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**The importance of “being modern”:
An examination of second generation
British Indian Bengali middle class
respectability**

By

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DPhil in Social Anthropology

December 2011

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of another degree.

Signature:

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

DPHIL IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

**THE IMPORTANCE OF “BEING MODERN”:
AN EXAMINATION OF SECOND GENERATION BRITISH
INDIAN BENGALI MIDDLE CLASS RESPECTABILITY**

SUMMARY

This thesis investigates the way that second generation British Indian Bengali middle class, predominantly Hindu respondents, have attempted to communicate their “modern” middle class respectability through their social practices, work and lifestyles. In their reproduction of this respectability, they attempt to distance negative British South Asian stereotypes prevalent in the media, work institutions and in day-to-day life; sometimes to the extent of ‘othering’ other South Asians generally or British Bangladeshi Muslim Sylhetis specifically. Second generation’s adaptive responses to racism and stigmatised stereotypes prevalent in British society also reaffirms the British Indian Bengali’s presumptions of their ethnic distinctiveness and justifying homogenising racist stereotyping of these ‘other’ South Asian groups. This thesis examines several aspects of their lives that are affected by these distinguishing tactics, through: presentation of their ethnicity; middle class identity; position of women within “the community”; ideas of love and romance and “type” of marriage. Additionally, there is an examination of how the second generation are increasingly challenging the assertion that all South Asians are primarily driven by ethnicity, religion and regional-language markers in their search for a marriage partner. Marriage trends amongst British Indian Bengalis are showing distinct moves away from finding a partner through ascribed statuses. Likewise, the second generation in their social interaction also exhibit a weaker sense of identification with their regional-language groups.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of study

Based on fieldwork carried out in the early 2000s this thesis examines how second generation British Indian Bengalis, a predominantly Hindu group, negotiate their identity through situating themselves within a middle class, “modern” respectability. The second generation attempted to carve out alternative content of respectability through distinguishing themselves from negative South Asian stereotypes perpetuated in the media and experienced within British White mainstream society. These distinctions from British South Asian Muslims hinge on a feared ‘proximity’ (Lawler 2005; Skeggs 2004) of these groups and the second generation British Indian Bengalis’ strategies of distinction and negotiation can be considered as situationally required or an ‘adaptive response’ (Pyke and Dang 2003) in avoiding stigma themselves. Modood (1996) argues the point that often groups have been put together in an unidentifiable mass, using the example of Pakistanis as indistinguishable from Indians in many circumstances in the wider society. The second generation of British Indian Bengalis whilst feeling a need to distinguish themselves from negative homogenising stereotypes of ‘British South Asians’, ‘British Asians’ and “British Muslims” in specific contexts, they themselves use this terminology not only to position others but also themselves. The terms of ‘Asian’, ‘South Asian’, ‘Indian’ and ‘Bengali’ are used interchangeably by these respondents especially in regards to stereotypes which were often aimed at an undifferentiated homogenised ‘Asian’ or ‘South Asian’ group. Importantly however, through British Indian Bengali’s distinguishing remarks and identifications away from specific groups (such as British Bangladeshi Muslims) to more generalised categories (such as British South Asian Muslims or ‘traditional’ British South Asians) they were also reaffirming their own presumptions of ethnic distinctiveness and justifying homogenising racist stereotyping of these groups.

The second generation endeavoured through its project of “modern”, middle class respectability to distinguish themselves through their social practices, lifestyles, marriage practices and gender. The notion of “being modern” and asserting a middle-

class status was used both collectively, and as individual actors to manage their ethnic identity, *vis-à-vis* other British South Asians and socioeconomic groups. This reconfiguration of the social system along with “being modern” has been influential in the shifting of “traditional” ideas of prestige, ascribed statuses (such as caste, language/regional affiliations, ethnicity, etc.) towards value statuses (such as education, occupation, life experience, taste and lifestyle, etc.). Being “modern”, middle class and a British Indian Bengali has also resulted in the countering of negative images of South Asian cultural practices where popular construction of British non-white ethnics were tied strongly to their ethnic identity. ‘Disidentifying strategies’ (Goffman 1963: 44) have been exercised to disrupt stereotypical assumptions particularly about marriage practices, gender and generation; sometimes reshaping or challenging meanings and images.

Both generations, particularly the second generation of Indian Bengalis have been resistant to stereotypical depictions of what it means to be “Bengali,” “Indian,” “Asian” or “South Asian”. Although not alone in their resistance, they have chosen to adopt alternative strategies to Modood’s ‘ethnic assertiveness’ (2003: 77). Thus agency was a helpful tool to understand how this group of second generation were able to manoeuvre between a micro-level (in this case individuals’ and group’s actions) and macro-level (wider society) processes (Giddens 1984). Individual agency influences social structure and processes, and conversely social structures and processes impacts on individual agency. Individuals are able to operate as active agents, shaping their own identity through strategies within the structures that can constrain their choices and intentions (Ortner 1996).

However, the notion of agency in ethnicity and other forms of identity was contingent on structure. An individual’s or a group’s assertions of an alternative identity at a specific time and place was limited to socially and politically defined categories. The question then arose: are Bengalis able to assert their socioeconomic status in such a way as to recalibrate their identity, where ethnicity is not their primary identification marker? There has been very little work examining this train of thought. Kibria notes however, that social mobility, if the socioeconomic conditions are appropriate, can allow ethnic minorities ‘some latitude in how to organize and express their ethnic identity’ (2000: 80), but she does not elaborate further. Expanding on Kibria’s

assertions this thesis argues that Bengalis have been able to convincingly use their position as second generation middle-class ethnic group employing strategies of ‘disidentification,’ countering and manoeuvring to assert a very specific “modern,” middle class British Indian identity. However, I contend that the British Indian Bengali second generation are actively attempting to engineer opportunities to make very clear their distinguishing features, beyond phenotypical characteristics that may be imposed on them. In the past literature documenting the social class of migrants to Britain has typically depicted South Asians as mostly from rural areas, from peasant farming families taking on predominantly industrial jobs (Ballard 1994; Warrier 1994). There was very little by way of literature describing middle class South Asian migration to Britain¹. Literature from the United States of America has in comparison a larger body of work recording the migration of technically skilled professionals and students from India. This makes drawing on literature from the United States of America more relevant to the case of British Indian Bengalis.

Kibria discusses how (2000: 84-85) Meg, a Chinese women in the United States, was able to counter ‘racialization’ as “Asian” by asserting her Chinese identity so as not to be mistaken as Korean (in the light of conflict that had arisen between Korean Americans and African American). This example illustrates that non-white ‘ethnics’ are able to transcend generalised racialisation as simply “Asian” in the public sphere, and not as Tuan (1998: 155) has asserted that while they are able to employ some degree of flexibility and selectiveness in ‘the retention or discarding of certain cultural practices’ they are restricted to their personal lives. Portes and Macleod (1996) have shown however, that ‘ethnics’ are able to stress a specific ethnic identity away from an indiscriminate or pan-ethnic term within a public context. They describe how Cuban Americans use their middle-class ‘ethnic options’ to assert their *Cuban* identity in preference to the pan-ethnic category of “Hispanic” – a term which can carry pejorative connotations in the USA. Here Portes and MacLeod make the connection between economic privilege and the possession of ‘ethnic options’; which was important in ‘determining the adoption or rejection of the panethnic category of “Hispanic”’. This

¹ Although Bhachu (1985) writes about South Asian ‘twice migrants’ who arrived to Britain via East Africa who were regarded as better equipped for survival within Britain as they were equipped with educational qualifications and spoke English.

ability and *motivation* to assert a particular identity marker, was a strategy employed by Bengalis to assert their socioeconomic status.

Much of the literature examining South Asian diaspora and subsequent generations have discussed ethnicity in terms of ethnic solidarity, ethnic attachments, 'between two cultures' (Watson 1977), examining various aspects of what it means to be an 'ethnic group', whether it is through 'having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements which define the group's identity, such as kinship, religion, language, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance' (Bulmer 1986: 54). Discussion on 'Asian' identity also emerged as a 'hybridic Asianess' as opposed to one based on regional-language, nation, caste or religious affiliation derived from the generation preceding them or modelled on forms of black sub-culture for example (Maira 2002). Modood highlights the growth of ethnic identity where its construction is less polarised between the 'other' and with 'being British', especially with the new Labour Government's emphasis on a 'plural and dynamic character of British society, and speaking openly of 'rebranding Britain' (Leonard 1997)' (Modood 2003: 78).

Bengali second generation have not developed this 'ethnic assertiveness' (Modood 2003: 77) to as great a degree as other South Asian groups have done. Modood suggests that this primary focus on ethnic identity has developed from a lack of respect afforded to them, restricting access to public space, and the countering of 'traditional or dominant stereotypes' (2003: 77) or as Hall describes the 'essentialised black subject' (1990: 235), in an attempt to challenge existing power relations. Modood notes how this has resulted in self-descriptions of skin-colour which was prominent amongst Afro-Caribbean and religious and regional-language identities and cultural practices which were more commonly identified amongst South Asians (Modood 2003; Modood et al. 1997). The authors observe that although there was decline in participation in distinctive cultural practices especially from the second generations, this decline did not mean that they ceased to identify with their ethnic or religious group, which could be maintained through an *associational* identity (Modood 2003: 82). Modood acknowledges however, that there can be exceptions, and cites the example of the East African Asians who may not prescribe primarily to ethnic/race/religious identification but considered employment as an equally important criterion of self-description.

Mindful of this acknowledgement by Modood, this study marks an exploration of a South Asian identity where *primary* identification is not located in ethnicity, religion, caste and/or language/region (direct or associational); their linkages to self-definition is situated principally in their socioeconomic status and other value statuses.

This thesis considers how Bengalis through the use of agency and a series of strategies, distinguish themselves particularly from other “traditional” South Asians particularly British Muslim “communities”; and reproduce “modern” middle-class respectability. “Being modern” is linked to being middle class and is considered a desirable commodity which is actively pursued and invested in. This distancing is used to secure a position within the middle-classes and a way to invigorate imaginings of British Indian Bengali identity.

Work on ethnicity offers various explanations on how immigrants and their offspring relate to the host country, their self-definition and their ethnic community. Perspectives vary from ‘acculturation’ (dissonant, consonant and selective) (Portes and Rambaut 2001), to ‘symbolic ethnicity’ (Waters 1990; Gans 1979) and to ‘racialised ethnicity’ (Purkaystha 2005; Kibria 2000 and Tuan 1998). It is important to consider how ethnicity has been conceptualised in regards to the second generation.

Perspectives on ethnicity

Traditions of assimilation or acculturation usually claim that on arrival ethnic minorities face increased levels of ethnic conflict. Portes and Rambaut (2001) identified various processes surrounding acculturation. They describe *dissonant acculturation* as taking place where young people quickly assume the ways of the host country and the English language; where parents do not progress as quickly. Therefore this trajectory leads to role reversal, where children act as translators for their parents, and they become more worldly and sophisticated about the culture of the host country, placing immigrant parents in a position of relative powerlessness, often dependant on their children. The second trajectory is *consonant acculturation*, which does not guarantee success. Parents’ and children’s striving for acceptance into the mainstream may be prevented by discrimination. However, consonant acculturation lays the basis for parental guidance and mutual intergenerational support in confronting challenges. This Portes and

Rambaut (2001) claim occurs most commonly among middle class immigrants and their children. With *selective acculturation* the second generation is embedded in a community that supports their parents, slows the loss of parent's home language and norms, and cushions the move of both generations into American ways. This is characterised by a lack of intergenerational conflict, the presence of co-ethnics as friends, and full bilingualism in the second generation.

The symbolic ethnicity model describes the lack of need for network and how white-ethnic groups are free to choose a variety of cultural "tools"- particular types of cultural practices that are picked because they best fit the context-to construct this kind of ethnicity. According to this view, as social costs of being an ethnic member have declined, white-ethnic groups have no need to maintain "deep ties" and supportive networks based on religious, linguistic, and other characteristics (Waters 1990; Gans 1979). Since outsiders are not defining them as ethnic and different, they can choose when, where, and how they want to do so. However, much of the research on symbolic ethnicity and models of assimilation or acculturation were based in America and built on the experiences of White-European ancestry. Straight-line assimilation model predicts that non-White immigrant groups and ethnic minority groups would also be able to assimilate into the mainstream fabric of America, once they had learned the English language and adopted American ways of living and behaving (Alba 1990; Waters 1990). However, empirical studies such as those carried out by Purkayastha (2005) and Kibria (2002) have shown that this type of assimilation does not apply to the case of many non-white ethnics either in the United States or Britain. Purkayastha points out that the 'defining feature of their ethnicity is that they are *unable* to exercise their ethnic options' (2005: 7) even when using similar 'tools' as described by Waters (1990).

Purkayastha (2005), Wu (2002), Kibria (2000) and Tuan (1998) use the *racialised ethnicity model* as a way to overcome what they argue are the limitations of other models which do not accommodate non-white ethnic groups and their social relationships within which they live. Irrespective of class position, non-white ethnics, they argue, are unable to define themselves as 'individuals', a freedom enjoyed by whites. Thus, the racialised ethnicity perspective indicates that it is not sufficient to look at whether they practice culture occasionally, but to ask what kind of networks

groups maintain and why they do so (Purkayastha 2005: 9-13). It is also important to find out what kind of cultural practices groups emphasise and the role such practices play in constructing their ethnicity. Purkayastha (2005) argues that these groups actively challenge, negotiate and attempt to shape the forces that marginalise them. One of the strategies they may use is to avoid being completely incorporated into the United States racial social system. The other is for groups to exhibit a process of racial ethno-genesis, where multiple racialised cultures develop a common denominator, which challenges racialisation. For British Indian Bengalis racialised ethnicity appears a difficult fit even though they, like Purkayastha's South Asians, grew up in middle class suburbs, which was filled mostly with the 'white' middle class. Amongst the Bengalis there was much less maintenance of caste, regional, ethnic and religious networks which was an essential aspect racialised ethnicity. With the second generation Bengalis I would suggest another strategy within the racialised ethnicity model, where, while there was a negotiation of ethnicity, the primary mobilisation strategy was that of class, where socioeconomic identities were used to mark themselves as a distinctly different group from stereotypical South Asians or "traditional" South Asians, and also to assert their middle-class identity as a way to transcend negative associations with being South Asian.

Bengalis, in asserting self-inventing notions of their identity, necessarily require the engagement with dominant representations and discourses about South Asians in the wider society and an acceptance of that status. Portes and MacLeod (1996: 536) make the case that those immigrants who are in more privileged socioeconomic status are able to resist 'the symbolic violence of unwanted outside labels', and negotiate their construction. Higher levels of resources have meant that the second generation have been able to access the mainstream and not be left marginalised in Britain, particularly in London. As first generation parents, had already entered higher education, white collar/professional work, having greater economic status and a desire to enhance their middle class status in the public realm; the second generation were in a better position to gain social acceptance. Strong parental normative controls were absent because of weaker social capital² amongst the Bengalis, as they were relatively dispersed

² Dika and Singh (referencing Lin) stated that, 'Bourdieu saw social capital as the investment of the dominant class to maintain and reproduce group solidarity and preserve the group's dominant position' (2002). Bourdieu also stated that social capital was created through 'contacts and group memberships

geographically, and less reliant on internal social capital, depending instead on their own economic, occupational success and access to strategic goods (Portes and Rambaut 2001: 62).³ Above all British Indian Bengalis valued education for themselves and their offspring, and as Bourdieu (1984) argued the education system was the primary institution through which class order was maintained.

For Bengalis, who most often came to Britain without extended families but armed with qualifications, means of gaining employment and relative fluency in the English language; they were more likely to be independent of each other and less likely to rely on exclusive Bengali social networks. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) identified how the level of cultural, linguistic and phenotypical distinctiveness between the receiving society and the immigrants had a bearing on the ‘magnitude of the clash’ (1993: 1329). It was this degree of prejudice together with the inability to escape the situation that results in greater group solidarity, thus the higher the likelihood of social capital based on this solidarity. Using many examples in the American context, Portes and Sensenbrenner further illustrated how the Chinese, the Russian Jewish population and Nicaraguans in America gathered social capital in opposition to discrimination of the host country. Cherti asserted that social capital was inversely proportional to the available options outside the community (2007: 5). The first generation of British Indian Bengalis used their cultural capital through their educational qualifications to establish careers outside of the Bengali community. They were not reliant on *Bengali* social networks for employment, entry into higher education (Allard 2005: 63-79; Bourdieu 1993: 143), finance or housing (basically bridging social capital)⁴. The

which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources’ (Bourdieu 1993: 143).

³ Portes and Rambaut also include examples such as a ‘home in the suburbs, a private school education, or a trip to the home country to reinforce family ties are all expensive propositions not within the reach of the average family. Those able to afford them can confront the challenges of second generation adaptation with a measure of equanimity’ (Portes and Rambaut 2001: 62).

⁴ Social capital was generated through social networks made up of family and wider society (including friends, peer groups, school, other community organisations or any other kind of ‘quality interactions and social identities’ (Allard 2005: 63-79).

Note the differences between Bourdieu with James Coleman and Robert Putnam: Bourdieu’s concept of ‘social capital’ has been interpreted differently by others such as Coleman Putnam. Dika and Singh draw attention to some significant differences between Coleman and Bourdieu. While Bourdieu distinguishes social capital as a means of reproduction for the dominant class, Coleman presents social capital as (positive) social control, where trust, information channels, and norms are characteristics of the community. Coleman’s emphasis is on the family’s responsibility to assume particularities to develop the life chances of their children. Bourdieu’s work however stresses the structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on class, gender, and race. It is Bourdieu’s conceptualisation that is used here.

amount of social capital a person acquired, Bourdieu argued, depended very much on the size and quality of the interaction within the network of these connections (Bourdieu 1993: 143; Bourdieu 1986)⁵. This was reflected in lower levels of community cohesion amongst the Bengalis where there were reduced number of marriages amongst Bengalis (see Chapter 7, *Marriage Selection*) and a lack of ghettoisation⁶. They were removed from the descriptions as laid out by Rex and Moore's study (1967) for example, where South's Asians were being relegated and segregated to the territorial edges of the city. British Indian Bengalis were able to trade off their social capital for their cultural capital including ideas of "being modern".

First generation British Indian Bengalis were not without *Bengali* social capital, usually alongside a broader array of capitals, especially in regards to cultural capital, some marriages and notions of an Indian Bengali identity (i.e. bonding social capital). Instead social capital was developed through their professional lives, education, various friendship networks (spanning through many nationalities and ethnicities not just Bengali) or through associations and organisations.

As the second generation entered employment in and around London, there was an increased sense of acceptance into Britain. Being mocked as a foreigner for the second generation was much less likely, as was described by Tuan (1998). Even weaker social capital within Bengali community networks developed, reducing the perceptions of 'magnitude of the clash' (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993: 1329) with the majority British white population. However, subtle and indirect levels of racism existed in the lives of the second generation, with inappropriate comments and questions asked of second generation British Indian Bengalis. Modes of subtle racism further encouraged the second generation to adopt strategies of "being modern" (see chapter 3: *The Second Generation*).

⁵ In Bourdieu's *The Forms of Capital* (1986) he distinguished between three types of capital: economic capital; social capital and cultural capital. Economic capital was a command over economic resources. Social capital was access to resources established through group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support. Cultural capital was forms of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society. He later added symbolic capital which were resources available to a person based on honour, prestige and recognition (Calhoun 2002).

⁶ Compared to other groups: such as Bangladeshis (see: Gardner 1994), Gujaratis (see: Prinja 1999), Moroccans (see: Cherti 2007: 5).

The lack of social capital fits into a broader ‘meritocratic’ rhetoric of the British Indian Bengalis; where equality and striving on one’s own steam was regarded as desirable qualities. Put another way, *because* British Indian Bengalis had high educational cultural capital, they did not need to pursue social capital assiduously. This was reflected in Savage’s and William’s work (2008: 7) on professional elites, which showed how ‘equal opportunities’ and proceduralised governance had impacted on businesses where they were increasingly keen not to be seen to recruit from the ‘old boys’ network; if only to *appear* ‘meritocratic’ and justify their privileged position. This also identifies growing opportunities for non-ethnics in London and Britain, more generally.

Additionally, in their article Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) identify how the greater the cultural and linguistic difference between the home country and the receiving society, the larger is ‘the magnitude of the clash’ (1993: 1329) and the higher the reliance of social capital. While Bengalis have great social capital, in Britain, it is not reducible to just a *Bengali* social capital, it is embodied broadly across a number of possible social networks whether professional, employment, education, higher education, various friendship networks (spanning through many nationalities and ethnicities not just Bengali), associations and organisations

The majority of the second generation referred to in this thesis live in or are in close proximity to London. Modood (2003: 86- 87) notes that London is ‘a leading centre of world communications, finance, trade and tourism, all these flows contributing to its cosmopolitan character and further reinforcing it, as business and tourism is attracted to London by its distinctive multicultural character and its ability to cater to diverse groups’. Modood then goes on to expand on the role of the Empire and the specific historical relationship Britain has had with various parts of the world, ‘despite its self-image of insularity, [has shown] . . . the readiness to borrow and mix ideas and influences, as supremely exemplified in the English language’ (2003: 86). It is this environment in which the second generation grew up, schooled and worked. While not belittling racism that many second generation may have experienced at various life-stages as ethnic minorities in Britain, London contained an ‘openness’ and ‘multicultural thinking’ that is not found in Northern Europe for example (Modood

2003: 86). London, I would argue, forms very heavily a part of the structure within which the second generation were able to practice agency.

Although Britain has no such equivalent to the American stereotypical concept of the “model minority” (Osajima 2004; Maira 2002; Lee 1994) the Bengalis in the British context in their middle class-ness attempted to project a life of educational and professional success, where they regarded themselves as socialised fully into, what Ray refers to, ‘global middle-class values and prejudices’ (Ray 2004: 6). Central to the development of British Indian Bengali middle class identity is the examination of what it means to be modern and middle class.

‘Modernity’ and the middle classes

Ahmad and Reifeld note that even Marx and Engels⁷ acknowledged the middle class in terms of ‘the social transformation of Europe from feudalism to the modern age was the work of the middle class’. Not merely inhabiting the in-between as a wide ranging group, (i.e. between the elite and the working class) they were, Misra argues, regarded as ideologically representative of an ‘intellectual freedom and social mobility, liberal individualism and political democracy’ (1961: 7). Thus, associations of middle class society developed into a stratified social order representing a new benchmark of values which individuals or groups ‘impressed upon the entire societies in which they lived’ (1961: 7). Ahmad and Reifeld note how all “great” revolutions in modern Europe, ‘from the Reformation to the translation of democratic ideals of individual freedom, civil liberties, secularism, and representative forms of government, where the result of various struggles waged and led by the middle class for the emancipation of civil society’ (2001: 4) as part of an European Enlightenment undertaking.

Many theorists maintain that ‘modernity’ is located within ‘advanced’ capitalist countries, identified as the European Enlightenment project (Rofel 1999: 10). ‘modernity’ has been used as a definite reference point; many Renaissance scholars refer to newly emerged men like Dante and Boccaccio, who through their ‘genius’ shaped Humanism (Burckhardt 1990). While Renaissance art was a sign of the

⁷ Who otherwise maintained the social polarisation of bourgeoisie/capitalist and proletariat construct.

materialisation of ‘the modern’ (Panofsky 1991: 63, 72); likewise in the ‘Scientific Revolution’ Rice and Grafton assert that “[o]nly modern western civilisation has produced a fully developed science . . . so different and so much more successful than the sciences of the ancient Greeks, the medieval Arabs, the Indians, and the Chinese” (1994: 18). Rationality and reason was also proposed to have emerged from European minds. Smart (1992) encapsulates the condition of ‘modernity’ with the development of Western processes of social change:

It is in the texts of the various Enlightenment *philosophies* that key elements of modern thought concerning the value of science, the power of reason, the irresistible progress or advance of humanity, and the prospect of freedom from oppression first receive systematic articulation and endorsement. (1992: 8)

Social theorists like Habermas (1987) and Giddens (1990) maintain that the ‘modern world has its centre of gravity in the West’ (Habermas 1987: 60), and ‘modernity’ has its roots in ‘specific characteristics of European history’ (Giddens 1990: 174) so much so that there are ‘few parallels in prior periods or in other cultural settings’ (174). This locating of ‘modernity’ within eighteenth and nineteenth century societies of the West sets up assumptions of the dichotomous ‘modern’ West and its ‘non-West’. Thus ‘modernity’ is seen as an unproblematic theoretical construct, where there was a well-defined before and after; notions of temporal and spatial disjuncture where specificity was located in the conceptual and historical. The world was consequently divided into the dichotomous - ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’, ‘Western’ and the ‘other’ and so forth. At the same time a specific history and cultural change in the formation of ‘modernity’, set Europe and European societies as having a single monolithic history, ‘marked out by epochal changes in the structure of European societies’ (Osborne 1995: 1).

The universalising of history within ‘modernity’ has been challenged by many academics who have questioned the West’s location, both within its history but also its fortune. Fabian questions how history within anthropology is connected to colonialist and imperialist politics which links conceptions of science and imperialism (Fabian 2000: 9-11), where there is virtually a ‘compulsive obsession of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century historiography’ (Mehta 1999: 82-87). While Chakrabarty argues that assumptions made within European history lay down the ‘theoretical skeleton’ on

which “other” philosophies merely ‘fleshes out’ the skeleton thus producing an incomplete, deterministic and universalistic history (Chakrabarty 2000: 27-30). Thus universalisation, not only rejects localisation, sensibilities and history within the West (Trouillot 1995: 35-36) but also requires ‘a localization in space in order to position subjects within the historicity it creates’ (38). They all question the ‘aggrandizing representation of a reified Europe’ (Dube 2002: 197).

There has been growing literature on ‘modernity’ moving away from the idea of having a linear historical process (Callinicos 1999: 13), what Mitchell (2002: 12) describes as the ‘counter-stream to homogenisation theory’ which centres on the ‘heterogeneity of global modernity’ (Robertson 1995: 25-28)⁸. Critical discussions questioned essentialised representations of otherness, examining predominant depictions of progress of a universal history, ideology, art and science ingrained in Western ‘modernity’. In *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy critiques the racial essentialism of ‘modernity’ narratives, he argues that ‘modernity’ was configured through slavery and racial ideology, thus questioning, Schein’s (1999) claims, of universalising and metamorphosis where ‘modernity can be said to unite all mankind’ (Berman 1983:15).

Scott proposes that ‘a critical interrogation of the practices, modalities, and projects through which the varied forms of its insertion into the lives of the colonized were constructed and organized’ (Scott 1999: 26). Scott in trying to find a postcolonial ‘modernity’ argues that old political rationality would need to be ‘systematically displaced’ by a new rationality with an ‘always-already transformed, set of coordinates, concepts and assumptions’ (Scott 1999: 52). Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) and Rofel (1999) while engaging in local discourses of ‘modernity’ in trying to conceptualise it, also remain within a particular understanding of ‘modernity’, which was constructed within the Western liberal tradition, where they were only challenging its ‘normative evaluations’ (Kahn 2001: 654-656). Ong also maintains this view presuming that ‘the West invented ‘modernity’ and other ‘modernities’ are derivative and second-hand’ (1996:61). Thus pluralisation has fallen into the same trappings of more linear historical understandings of ‘modernity’, being too subjective and deterministic. Where

⁸ Although Robertson argues that it should not be a question of setting up a polarisation of heterogenisation or homogenisation, but to recognise the ways in which both have developed into features of life in late-twentieth-century-world. Robertson, R. (1995: 27).

‘modernity’ is constructed spatially and temporally regardless of whether modernity hypothesis have been single or ‘multiple modernities’ there has been a basic reliance of the social formations of ‘the West’ and ‘traditional societies’ (Wagner 1994: 3).

Van der Veer (1998), argues that instead of speaking of multiple modernities it would be better to speak ‘of multiplicity of histories’ thereby retaining “a sense of the uniqueness and power of European ‘modernity’ together with a sense of complexity and variation of its clash with historical processes in many parts of the world’ (1998: 285). However, Van der Veer’s argument that ‘modernity’ was ‘an ideology that originates in the Enlightenment’ (285) emphasises the deployment of a ‘North Atlantic universal’ where it set a rigid understanding of what ‘modernity’ was, where in its projection conceals ‘the specific-localized, and thus parochial-historical location’ (Trouillot 2003: 36).

Modernity has to do not only with the relationship between place and space but also with the relation between place and time. In order to prefigure the theoretically unlimited space-as opposed to the space within which management occurs-one needs to relate place to time, or address a unique temporality, that is, the position of the subject located in that place. Thus modernity has to do with those aspects and moments in the development of the world capitalism that require the projection of the individual or collective subject against both space and time. It has to do with historicity. (Trouillot 2003: 37)

These divergent articulations and interpretations of ‘modernity’ have uncovered contradictory understandings and highly contested histories. So much so that sociological understandings have sometimes formulated theoretical accounts that construct concrete histories. And when this understanding of ‘modernity’ is constructed through the European experience, this notion fails to problematise the basic premise that fuses ‘modernity’ with Europe and the West, still locating ‘other’ modernities in relation to this ‘original’ ‘modernity’, as opposed to ‘modernity’ in its own terms.

Partha Chatterjee is perhaps a case in point. Chatterjee made the connection between colonialism and ‘modernity’, constructing them in opposition without problematising the prior reconstruction of the historically differentiated structures and projects of colonial rule thus homogenising colonialism. He describes ‘modernity’ in terms of ‘Western ideas’ (Chatterjee 1993) where the formulation of colonial dominance is

grounded in temporality and historicity.⁹ Challenging these underlying assumptions Ashish Nandy (1983) locates his work in the reinterpretation of traditions to create ‘new traditions’, generating an alternative language of theoretical discourse to the universalising theories of the Western academy (1983: xvii-xviii). Nandy moves away from viewing India as an embodied agent of the ‘non-West’, he does not attempt to develop a concept of a ‘true’ East, which he argues has been frequently comprehended to be the obverse of the West and thus even more irrevocably bound to it (1983: 73). Nandy claims that the options are not between East and West but ‘other India which is neither pre-modern not anti-modern but only non-modern . . . a choice – and a battle – between the Apollonian and Dionysian within Indian and within the West’ (1983: 74). To universalise ‘modernity’ is to deny their localisation and particular histories, thus being prescriptive rather than describing what is happening or could be happening (Trouillot 2003: 35, 36).

In search of an historical authenticity, away from universal constructions of ‘modernity’ requires being located in a specific place that takes account of local and/or global construction. However, this thesis remains mindful that ‘modernity’ presents deep challenges with little consensus (Gaonkar 1999; Trouillot 2003) that gives ‘modernity’ an ‘imaginary status’ (Rofel 1999: 17) this is not to negate the genuine feelings that people have about “being modern”, what Rofel calls “techniques of normalization” (Rofel 1999: 17) where the word “modern” ‘evokes sensibilities, perceptions, choices, and states of affairs that are not easily captured by other words’ (Trouillot 2003). Fergusson’s description of the dualism that Copperbelt dwellers used when speaking of contrasting styles of the ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ which were interchangeably used to contrast ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ (1999: 82-122) provides a good example of this ‘normalisation’. Similarly, Chatterjee’s accounts of middle class nationalist elites dividing culture into material (economy, science, technology and state-craft) and spiritual domains (represented by religion, caste, women, the family and peasants) were divided into the ‘colonial modernity’ and ‘Indian spiritual tradition’, even though as Rodrigues observes that ‘modernity’ could not be ‘anchored on diverse conceptual

⁹ Scott identifies three areas that require addressing, the first was Chatterjee’s rule of difference where he does not distinguish between earlier and later colonial rule, seeing it as a continuous; secondly that colonial difference is a rule of exclusion/inclusion. Thirdly the assertion that “race” can be said to characterised by Othering practices of colonialist discourse in all its historical instantiations (Scott: 1999)

mapping (Taylor 1999: 153-74; Bhargava 2001: 9-26)' (2006: 54-58), however this dualism encapsulated a 'particular version of modernity' (Rodrigues 2006: 55).

Like Mitchell, I will approach 'modernity' as a 'discursive field' (Mitchell 2002: 16) within which second generation British Indian Bengalis in the 2000s discussed, reproduced, transformed, performed and navigated their identity; identifying, as Liechty advocates, through practices, preoccupations and values (2003). I will concentrate on practices and preoccupations that were utmost in the minds of the Bengalis. "Being modern" was constructed in diametric opposition to "*being* traditional", which I will consider in terms of localised understandings and categories, however these definitions become a site for ambiguity, subversion, negotiation and representations of desire. This model of "being modern" drew on differentiating themselves from other South Asian groups with an emphasis on "liberalism", and "moderate" values, although not universally or uniformly practiced even by those who were committed to these ideals. The discourse concerning what it means to be "modern" has influenced the development of the middle class in Bengal.

Historical roots of the Indian Bengali middle class

For British Indian Bengalis this specific construction of "being modern" was understood in terms of their "cultural" and "historical heritage". They saw their "being modern" as part of a continuum where first and second generation placed themselves and others at various points along the scale. Historical processes were important in understanding the way group formation was imagined by the British Indian Bengali middle class. The creation of the middle class in Bengal was highly influenced by the development of the British colonial educational policy. Although Sen (1988) proposes that a 'bourgeois' class preceded the British colonisation of India, I would argue that it was more a situating and contextualising "older social distinctions" (Fernandes 2006: 4) that fashioned a broader landscape upon which the middle class of India was developed.¹⁰ With Mughal power being devoured by a larger political mechanism (Heesterman 1978), this British influence significantly paved the way for the creation of India's 'distinct' middle class (Joshi 2001). Bengal's colonial middle class, in particular, was

¹⁰ For a more in-depth analysis of Indian conditions prior to colonisation of the British see: Misra (1961).

culturally invented on the basis on educational policies. With Lord Hardinge's proclamations that the English language was a requirement for employment within all public services in 1844, made English the only way to access higher appointments for Indians. The emerging middle class were drawn from members of the service and literary classes (mostly encompassing writers and intellectuals that formed a part of the emerging intelligentsia). The benefits of an English education were most heavily reaped by the *bhadraloks* of Bengal, and they occupied most of the posts available in administration. This furthered the benefits acquired by inherent biases and inequities by the *bhadralok* and helped to consolidate their socioeconomic status within colonial rule (Fernandes 2006; Sarkar 2001 and Chatterjee 1992).

These boundaries of the middle classes were reliant on the reworking of existing social hierarchies of religion and caste. However, the formation of the religious make up of the middle classes was dependent on region. Whilst in United Provinces Muslims had more access to urban and government jobs, indistinguishable from the ambitions of upper caste middle class Hindus (Joshi 2001; Sangari 2001); in contrast in Bengal, Muslims were often excluded from the higher reaches of this class¹¹. The extent of this disparity is illustrated by the figures of "urbanized" Muslims, in Northwest Provinces it was 25 per cent, whilst in Bengal it was three to four per cent (Hardy 1972). Fernandes notes how this socioeconomic competition within the professional classes 'intersected with religious tensions within the complex field of colonial state intervention' (2006: 9) provoking strong opposition from the Hindu middle classes (Joshi 2001: 102). Religious identity thus played a complex role in the formation of the colonial middle class (discussed further below). Middle class boundaries were further restricted through existing social inequalities of caste, which saw high castes very well represented amongst the middle class. Like religious hierarchy, the caste system was maintained as a characteristic of a Bengali middle class structure.

In Bengal, British norms of middle class professional respectability were not purely imposed from the outside; they intertwined with and reshaped indigenous middle class definitions of *bhadralok* respectability. (Fernandes 2006: 8)

¹¹ Sangari notes that this was further compounded by less Muslim recruits being employed by the ICS and Muslims being slower than Hindu elites to invest in education. See: Sangari, K. (2001) *Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narratives, Colonial English*, London: Anthem Press, p. 140.

While the middle class were keen to emphasise the “cultural” value of education (Fernandes 2006) the dimensions of socioeconomic positioning produced a highly structured elite that would conform to British norms of respectability. Requirements into the Indian Civil Service (ICS), Potter (1996) argues, required not only English language skills but to be of a “respectable” socioeconomic position and family. Potter cites several examples of candidates who were “not suitable” because ‘his father is a retired bank clerk who has no property’. Another candidate was considered “unsuitable” as he was from ‘humble social status’. A successful applicant was one who was of ‘a very respectable . . . family who are well represented in the Mysore State Service’ (Potter 1996: 113). Therefore, speaking English, coming from “a good family”, education, professional occupation and property ownership were essential in demarcating the upper tier of colonial middle class in India. The archetypical image of the middle classes was compounded in Presidency towns such as Calcutta where it deepened the power of the middle class (Fernandes 2006; Sangari 2001; Sarkar 2001; 1992 and Chatterjee 1992).

However, the colonial middle class was filled with anxieties and dislocations of middle class identity and practices. The Indian middle class at this point was dependent on and constrained by the colonial state, therefore its access to socioeconomic mobility and political power. These constraints on a sizeable number of the lower middle class created a defining anxiety, which was partially negotiated through culturally based projects. Middle class identity was articulated by means of various emerging public discourses of social reform, moral regeneration and respectability (Fernandes 2006; Chatterjee 1993; Joshi 2001; Sarkar 2001) which contained many contradictions and inconsistencies (Fernandes 2006). This was well illustrated through the way that the middle classes claimed that they represented both their own public interests and that of the subordinated social groups (Sangari 2001 and Sarkar 2001). The middle classes adopted a ‘superficial modernism of the middle classes’ (Nehru 1988 [1946]: 57) where they asserted a secular representative citizenship whilst simultaneously reproduced socio-cultural distinctions.¹² Gandhian discourses on the improvement of the social

¹² Joshi (2001) also charts the way that the emerging middle class invoked new forms of social status to distinguish themselves from traditional elites in the public arena, invoking statuses of educational training and occupational hierarchies.

status of the poor and low castes were often echoed middle class rhetoric however, not reflected in the composition of organisational leadership (Amin 1995).

This management of these culturally based projects was based on maintaining internal hierarchies of caste, class and religion as was illustrated in the ‘improvement’ of middle class women which maintained patriarchal, caste and class structures. One such intersection of gender, class and a Hindu religiosity saw Hindu middle class concerns over women’s disempowerment, which was increasingly depicted through images of Muslim oppressions (Joshi 2001: 102). Vilification of Muslims was to resurface throughout the construction of boundaries and self-definition for these high caste, Hindu, Bengali middle class. This extended across continents and time to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Britain amongst many British Indian Bengali middle class.

Together, these multi-defining characteristics made it possible for the middle class to make a claim for leadership, based on their assertions of moral superiority that were connected to the cultural dimensions of modernisation. This produced ‘an underlying set of linkages between the middle class, modernity, and the ability to make claims on the colonial state . . . Such reforms were not, however, straightforward reflections of a technological move towards modernization’ (Fernandes 2001: 12). Instead, this undertaking of ‘modernity’ materialised through discussions of social practices and public discourses, concerning issues such as roles for women, both in the public and private sphere,¹³ consumption and cultural implications of education (Sangari 2001; Sarkar 2001).

Fernandes (2006) and Chatterjee (1990: 132) agree that cultural distinctions were a fundamental aspect of middle class identity, however, Fernandes proposes a more complex interpretation. The cultural leadership undertaken by the middle class, she argues, was done so on the public political stage and ‘did not simply represent the attempt of the middle classes to return to a protected inner cultural sphere . . . making of this middle class identity also centrally rested on specific claims made within civil

¹³ For further discussions on gender as boundary markers see Chapter 5 “*Modern*” *Bengali Women*.

society' (2006: 14).¹⁴ A significant array of political activity emerged out of English educated middle classes' who made claims on representing the wider public in the arenas of 'social reform, cultural nationalism, and public sphere activity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (Fernandes 2006; Chatterjee 1992; 1993 and Joshi 2001). This "concern" took these urban middle and elite classes into leadership roles within the nationalist struggle forging unity amongst the masses, only to betray them in favour of their class self interest after Independence was achieved (Mawdsley 2004; Gadgil and Guha 1995; and Sen 1988).

Forms of control as exercised by the middle class consisted of a complex set of practices and discourses that sought to use the language of elective rights and political representation on the one hand and then introduce socio-spatial control over the urban poor (Gooptu 2001) on the other. Kaviraj (1997) notes how the middle class used 'traditional' forms of coercive regulation such as policing and political repression, whilst also engaging in discursive modes of regulatory power embodied in middle class projects of social reformism.¹⁵

The emergence of Indian independence solidified the dynamics of a middle class whose political identity depended on simultaneous reliance on secular assertions of representative citizenships and the reproduction of socio-cultural distinctions. This only intensified, Fernandes argues, with the impact of partitions where the migration of Muslim professional classes left few Muslims in key positions within sectors such as defence services, police and universities (2006: 19). This development served to shape understandings of what it meant to be middle class which were further reinforced through the state. Nehruvian socialist and 'modernist' outlook fed middle class rhetoric addressing the poor and developmental practices and policies, however, as Kohli observes, 'Nehru's government spent little on health and primary education, underlining the superficial quality of Indian socialism' (2004: 266). Instead, state governments financially invested a disproportionate high level on higher education, responding to the

¹⁴ The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also saw an explosion of civic associations in Calcutta and in urban centres around India, including elite voluntary associations and educational societies, cooperative unions of English-educated middle classes (for the breadth of interests and factions of the colonial middle class see: Watt 2005).

¹⁵ Success of middle class domination in Indian cities, was dependent on the regulations of public spaces in line with conceptions of hygiene and order that were developed from discourses of colonial modernity (Kaviraj 1997).

‘insistent demands of influential urban middle class’ (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 296). Nehru’s vision of progress and ‘modernity’ led to education given great value, especially higher education. Degrees of medicine and engineering were especially valued (Varma 1998: 39). This pursuit of ‘modernity’ was an appealing objective for the middle classes who were able to consolidate their position through a state funded education, networks of patronage and their dominant footing in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) who drew 94 per cent of their recruits from the professional and service classes between the years of 1947 and 1956 (Potter 1996: 231)¹⁶. This historical process, as outlined above, is a valuable means to contextualise British Indian Bengali identity.

“Being Modern” in Britain

The migration of this first generation, mostly high caste, middle class¹⁷ to Britain between the 1950s to the 1970s coincided with the Nehruvian socialist rhetoric of post-independent India, with its focus on poverty, developmental practices and policies reflecting a ‘modern outlook’ (Fernandes 2006). As students and early careerists, these new migrants to Britain lacked significant economic capital which strengthened their valuing of “cultural life”. They asserted their distinction in terms of their cultural capital, especially through “high culture” and lifestyle choices, such as an investment of education. These claims of middle class distinction became necessary to distance themselves from other ethnic groups that may otherwise have become precariously indistinguishable from themselves in terms of spatial, cultural and/or economic terms. Middle class British Indian Bengalis identity was also shaped by the reproduction of social inequalities such as gender, caste and religion, carried over from the eighteenth century *bhadralok*¹⁸, particularly by the first generation of Indian Bengalis.

Arrival to Britain of the first generation saw parallels with the *bhadralok* of Calcutta in relation with education, state and wealth. Like the *bhadraloks* before them most of them were without substantial wealth and power but armed with education and

¹⁶ This trend continued well into the early 1980s which Potter (1996: 231) notes was at a staggering 71 per cent.

¹⁷ Various strata of the Indian middle classes

¹⁸ The *bhadralok* were the traditional literati, drawn from the upper castes of pre-colonial Bengal. Its literal definition means ‘respectable people’.

qualifications or on the road to. They were over time able to gain a measure of wealth and obtain various levels of social status within the structures of Britain. Structural restrictions meant that from the 1950s onwards they faced prejudice in many areas of their lives. The 1960s and 1970s right wing press claimed that ‘the wily’ Asian was evading the new immigration rules in order to gain access to the British ‘honey pot’ and were abusing the arranged marriage system (Brown 1995). Meanwhile, many first generation men and women were systematically disadvantaged in regards to access to jobs, career mobility and the places where they found employment. It was well documented that South Asian medical doctors for example, were given lower rungs of a pyramidal medical hierarchy. Anwar and Ali’s (1987) study showed how overseas doctors had been less successful in entering the higher tiers of occupational structure in comparison to their white counterparts. This was reminiscent of the *bhadralok*’s stunted growth by strong racial barriers in the employment in the higher ranks within.

Prominence given to the importance of education amongst the Bengalis was a powerful ideal, which came from a long “*bhadralok* tradition”. Gopal Krishna Gokhale’s¹⁹ inflated comments of Bengal’s achievements in his well known statement of ‘what Bengal thinks today, the rest of India thinks tomorrow’ perhaps illustrates the assumption of authority and tradition around education, thought and ‘modernisation’. This quote was sometimes cited by Bengalis (especially the first generation) to reiterate Bengal’s status as a “forward thinking culture” and state as opposed to a ‘historical accident’²⁰. A modernisation ‘that sought to combine traditional forms of learning and culture with modern perspectives gleaned from Western styles of education and politicization of the elites. This resulted in the ‘Bengal renaissance’ of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ (Basu and Amin 2000: 769-770). One of the most famous ‘products’ (Saha 2001: i) of the Bengal Renaissance was Rabindranath Tagore, who was and still is a cultural icon for millions of Indians and Bangladeshis (O’Connell and O’Connell 2008a: 961). Tagore was regarded as a ‘visionary’ of ‘modern India’ (Atkinson 1989) in a broad array of areas ranging from learning and culture to art and social reformation. First generation British Indian Bengalis in particular were

¹⁹ Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a prominent Indian nationalist leader who said of the Bengalis (a century ago).

²⁰ For further discussion on the development of Bengal as the first major outpost of the British Empire see: Basu and Amin (2000).

particularly proud of their ‘modern’ Bengali Nobel laureate (see chapter 4: *Trying to become Bengali*).

This tradition of “being modern” was fused with learning and culture was not lost in on British Indian Bengalis and an important resource through which their middle class identity could be defined. The value of education was drilled into second generation British Indian Bengali by their first generation parents. While there was a strong first generation preoccupation with medical and scientific professions, the second generation challenged these expectations by entering a broad range of university degrees and occupations. However, professions such as the medical profession and law still held particular kudos, especially amongst the first generation. The importance in developing education in Britain was made all the more acute in establishing themselves as middle class, satisfying anxieties of being mistaken for ‘the wily Asian’ who was taking advantage of British.

Reproduction of ‘modern’ middle class values began to develop differently from their middle class counterparts in Bengal and India more broadly. British Indian Bengali identity was shaped through a complex combination of stereotypical depictions of the ethnic ‘other’ in Britain; reproduction of social inequalities (such as class, caste, religious and gender) inherited from India and communication of class position. ‘Being modern’ for Bengalis therefore, followed a very particular narrative, linked to ethnicity, class, identity and education. “Being modern” was not considered a relevant category for white British individuals and more about differentiating their “respectable”, “educated”, middle class, Indian, mostly Hindu selves from negative stereotypical understandings of “Asians” in Britain, in a British context. Thus, the terrain of this “new” middle class identity of the first generation negotiated both continuity and change. This distinguishing was adapted further by the second generation.

Constructing the ‘other’: defining oneself

Wacquant (1991) explains how middle-classness is not a straight forward classification, but that it is constructed through material and symbolic struggles. Respectability provides a context for how particular variables produce the uncertainty of losing their place in middle-classdom. Bourdieu explains:

It is in these intermediate zones of social space that the indeterminacy and the fuzziness of the relationships between practices and positions are the greatest, and that the room left open for symbolic strategies designed to jam this relationship is the largest. (Bourdieu 1987: 12)

The middle classes consequently had to continually produce, reproduce and transform to preserve their positions within the margins of this “fuzziness”. A significant aspect in the presentation of Hindu British Indian Bengali second generation²¹ identity was the expression of distinction from “undesirable” South Asian stereotypes, particularly from British Muslim Bangladeshis. It was a strategy by which they communicated their ‘being modern’ and middle class. Expressions of distance of Muslim Bangladeshis - their namesake (i.e. sharing of ‘Bengali’), in particular, but also anyone deemed as ‘traditional’ South Asians and/or Muslim, drew on a collective negative class assumptions and racist notions surrounding South Asians and Muslims. Haylett illustrates how the positioning of the middle class as ‘modern’, refers to ‘liberal, cosmopolitan, work and consumption based lifestyles and values, being pitted against ‘the unmodern’ (2001: 365). In particular, the depictions of the ‘other’ as ‘traditional’, ‘illiterate’, ‘ignorant’, ‘uneducated’ and ‘fanatical’ legitimises their own claims of ‘being modern’, ‘liberal’, ‘middle class’ and respectably ‘normal’. Claims that the ‘others’ are reluctant to ‘modernise’ is blamed on their ‘backward’, ‘uneducated’ and ‘fanatical’ tendencies. Modood’s recognition of the dichotomous presentation of British South Asians as (1992: 43) ‘achievers’/‘underclass’ has further helped to perpetuate both stereotypes and the need to be aligned to positive and advantageous constructions. Regardless of their own inherent contradictions, the significance and pressure of Bengalis attempting to portray themselves as ‘modern’ presents its own demands, as explored further in this thesis.

It is important to emphasise that these discussions are not about British Bangladeshis, Muslims and ‘other’ British South Asians themselves but the way that they are described, deemed as ‘problematic’ and a part of a rehearsed narrative given by many middle class British Indian Bengalis. This perception of British Bangladeshis as the ‘other’ was not substantiated (see: Hussain 2005; Samad and Eade 2002; Alexander

²¹ This was also adopted by the first generation.

2000). As Lawler (2005) and Skeggs (2004) state, such representations have nothing to do with the people that they are ‘othering’, but offer an insight into those who are holding themselves up as ‘normalised’ and ‘middle class’ British Indians. Lawler has argued in relation to classed identities how there is a reliance on a ‘relational, rather than the substantive, manifestations of classes existence’ (2005: 430). While, British Indian Bengalis work hard to produce a ‘modern’, ‘middle class’ South Asian identity it relies very importantly on *not* being ‘traditional’, ‘working class’, ‘uneducated’. Describing Bangladeshis as ‘traditional’, an ‘under-class’ and ‘fanatical’ are ways to code them as ‘unsophisticated’ and ‘uneducated’ British South Asians, generating a set of assumptions - a ‘pathologization’ (Lawler 2002; 2005; see also Alexander 2000). The reliance of an established pathologisation in both visual and print media, of some South Asians and in particular Muslims, for the British Indian Bengalis, are intertwined with an apprehension of being mistaken for the very people they wish to ascribe these stereotypes.

While the British Indian Bengalis’ experience of “being modern” was based on a ‘continuum of variation’ (Friedman 1995:88); in their vigour to differentiate themselves from “undesirable” categories of people, they also created these dualisms. The production of their identity was set in binary opposition to “undesirable” categories of people, creating dualisms such as *shikitto/aushikkito* (“cultured” and “educated” versus “uncultured” and “uneducated”), “modern” and “traditional”. “Being modern”, for Bengalis, was a tool of disassociation and distance, employed to assert moral authority. Bhabha (in Hall and Wortham 1996: 62-63) powerfully observes that it is proximity as opposed to distance that produces anxiety, threats and a need to differentiate from the proximate stranger who is not as easily identifiable, and so is constructed to do so. The essentialised closeness that is skin colour and being of South Asian descent, brought about Bengali angst of being framed as “Muslim,” “uneducated,” “fanatical,” “traditional,” and/or “backward”; which was echoed within particular representations in the press. Thus the representation of both generations was dependent on strenuously distancing themselves from Bangladeshi groups and other “traditional” South Asians, thus maintaining their own respectability. Bengalis would make a series of distinctions so that there could be no confusion between the two groups, creating a ‘recognizable figure’ (Skeggs 2005: 270).

In an insightful article, Steph Lawler (2002) writes about the events that centred around Paulsgrove, Portsmouth, where immorality, irrationality and idiocy were encapsulated within the body of the working class mother during anti-paedophile protests. This ‘othering’ process, whereby working class women were depicted in the middle class press in opposition to a middle class rationality. These expressions of disgust are enabled through relying on the repulsion of what Skeggs (2005) describes as a reliance of ‘public acknowledgement’ and recognition:

In other words, when something or someone is designated as excessive, immoral, disgusting, and so on, it provides collective reassurance that we are not alone in our judgement of the disgusting object, generating consensus and authorization for middle-class standards, maintaining the symbolic order. (2005: 970)

Bourdieu’s (1986) implicit references to excess and to a lack of ‘taste’²² can be applied to the case of Bangladeshi Sylhetis, where their ‘lifestyle’ was described in terms of disgust and a way for Indian Bengalis to distinguish themselves. These are further amplified in a way to differentiate their middle class selves from the recognisable figure of the Sylheti, what Skeggs (2005) describes in terms of being ‘*too* authentic and *too* primitive’. Respectability then has come to personify a moral authority; whereby the “respectable Bengalis” are in possession of respectability, and the “others” primarily British Bangladeshi Sylhetis Muslims and other “traditional” South Asians do not possess this respectability and in effect cannot be capable of possessing it.

This ownership of respectability becomes for the British Indian Bengalis *their* middle class possession, the way that they position themselves within these boundaries of respectability. Bengalis work hard at signalling their class status to other ethnic groups and “White people”. Anderson (1990) observes an ardent anxiety with ‘propriety and decorum’ among black middle-class residents of a race- and class within a heterogeneous neighbourhood. Lawler’s work examines the pathologising of working class women, in the same way the pathologising of Bangladeshis in particular, is a strategy for attributing values to their middle class identity. Thus by using ascribing negative values to the ‘other’, it works also to enhance one’s own values and maintaining of the ‘*position of judgement*’ (Skeggs 2005: 977).

²² Bourdieu argues that social identity ‘lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat’ (1986: 479).

Press coverage has helped sketch out this recognisable and indeed dominant racialised stereotype in the popular imagination and is one that spans many areas including: women; men; social practices (in particular marriage practices); poverty, education generational conflict and religious fundamentalism. Constructing, in essence, what Lawler describes as ‘‘faulty’ character traits’ that forms a part of a ‘condition’ which is intrinsically linked to their group (2005).

One of the most focussed areas of interest in the media is the constructing of South Asian women as passive victims of oppressive cultures (Alexander 2000, Dwyer, C. 1998 and Parmar 1984) and in particular Muslim women are represented as the personification of a repressive and ‘fundamentalist’ religion (Said 1978; also see: Dwyer, C. 1998). Alexander (2000) argues, that this media depiction has tended to present Bangladeshi Muslims as ‘positioned as the objects of control’ which presents Muslim societies as inherently sexist and patriarchal (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). In particular the press explored stories of abandonment, forced marriages, described in terms of arranged marriages, honour crime; headlines and sub-headings give a flavour of the articles written: ‘Abandoned in Pakistan by her British husband: A woman fights to be reunited with her son after alleging that her in-laws drugged her and dumped her back at her parents’ home’ (Lahani, 2010, *The Independent*). Another announced, ‘‘It was my fault says mother of arranged marriage girl, 16’’ (Cramb 2002, *The Daily Mail*), a different newspaper wrote of, ‘Murder fear in arranged marriage’ (Carter 2003, *The Guardian*). Very few press articles present alternative narratives (see Ghafour 2002, *The Daily Telegraph*).

Likewise, the depiction of young British Muslim men in the media and press has problematised Muslim masculine identities, where there is a notion of ‘masculinities in crisis’ Alexander (2000):

Male redundancy Violence, criminality, drug taking and alcohol consumption become the means to gaining prestige for a masculine identity bereft of any social value. (Rutherford 1988: 7 in Alexander 2000: 16)

Poverty and socio-economic disadvantage was also applied, by the media, to specific groups such as the British Bangladeshis. Reports compiled by research bodies and academics also frame the Bangladeshis failing as a group, where their level of social deprivation is presented in contrast to other ethnic groups.

Analysing official figures, the foundation [Joseph Rowntree Foundation] found vast differences in child poverty among different groups. One in four white children live in poverty, compared with 74% of Bangladeshi children, 60% of Pakistani children, and 56% of black African children. (Dodd 2007, *The Guardian*)

In addition to this, Alexander argues, working class young Muslim men also contend with ‘the correlation of ethnicity/religion with perceived underclass status is an additional nail in the coffin; a series of associations clearly traceable in the media representations’ (2000: 16-17). These depictions have been an ongoing theme within the media, with headlines such as: ‘Asian gangs face London crime crackdown’ (Tendler 2003, *The Times*) and ‘Gang warfare on the streets of London as Asian and Black youths battle outside Julie Christie’s house’ (Martin and Firth 2008, *The Daily Mail*). This furore has deepened with the concern over ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ (Alexander 2000; Dwyer et. al. 2008) where Muslim men were defined as ‘militant and aggressive, intrinsically fundamentalist, [the] ultimate Others’ (Dwyer, C. et al 2008). These media depictions were also framed within academic and government research where Muslim men were often portrayed in terms of low educational achievers, unemployed and socially excluded (Cabinet Office Unit 2003). Religious fundamentalism has been particularly linked with Islam, in the media, with articles singling out the ‘peculiarity’²³ and Muslims and the ‘danger’ they pose:

“No, it is not the fact of immigration that is regrettable, but the way in which it has sometimes been allowed to develop. Surely the events of the past few weeks [London bombings of 7th July 2005] have taught us that most of us - whether Christian, Hindu, Sikh or Jew - know practically nothing about many of our fellow British citizens who are Muslims. They have been able - one might say encouraged - to create their own religious and cultural enclaves in which it is possible for extremists to flourish.”

²³ See also: Camber’s (2009) article in *The Daily Mail* entitled: “Honour crime up by 40% due to rising fundamentalism”

Glover, S. (2005) *The Daily Mail*

This estrangement of Muslims with ‘most of us’ was often attributed to former academic claims of the ‘generation gap’ and ‘cultural conflict’ (Anwar 1979), which the media argued, fuelled the alienation of young Muslims. Second and third generation Muslims are represented as ‘caught between two cultures’ and ‘torn’ by a ‘culture clash’ (Anwar 1979), where ‘a community struggling to come to terms with itself and modern Britain’ (Alabhai Brown 1995, *The Independent*). Dwyer, C. et al (2008) and Alexander (2000) have argued that these media representations have permeated into the field of academe providing simplistic and crude depictions of Muslims. Dwyer, C et al. (2008), Eade and Garbin (2006), Alexander (2000), Dwyer, C. (1998) and Brah (1993) amongst others have made the case for a more nuanced approach in dealing with the representation of Bangladeshis and/or Muslims. However, this subtlety of representation often fails to be represented in the popular media. For example, while the British Bangladeshi community are experiencing a range of socio-economic issues (Change Institute (2009) and Peach 2005: 23), third generation British Bangladeshis have seen growing rates of educational success (Samad & Eade 2002, Dench et al 2006)²⁴ which has been less acknowledged in the press beyond marking out individuals from the Bangladeshi community (exceptions include: Clark, (2007))²⁵. The article states that:

Ethnic minority children are making better progress at school than white pupils in almost every part of the country, research revealed yesterday. Chinese, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi and black African pupils are improving more quickly between the ages of 11 and 16. (Clark 2007, *The Daily Mail*)

Similarly, although there was acknowledgment by the DCGL that there was a small but growing British Bangladeshis middle class that were understood to be ‘achieving educational outcomes on par with Indian pupils’ (DCLG 2009: 36), there has been little

²⁴ Likewise, reports that have been published to demonstrate changing trends, such as the Department of Communities and Local Government (2009) which stated that between 2005-06, 32% of Bangladeshi females and 29% of Bangladeshi males were entering higher education by age 19 were often far less well known.

²⁵ The articles states that: “Ethnic minority children are making better progress at school than white pupils in almost every part of the country, research revealed yesterday. Chinese, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi and black African pupils are improving more quickly between the ages of 11 and 16.” Clark (2007) *The Daily Mail*

to no recognition in the press to illustrate developments in Bangladeshi education levels, particularly amongst the third generation. Davis (2007) of *The Guardian* even goes as far as to state that: ‘Muslim success stories are harder to come by. Because the UK's Muslim population exists disproportionately in the lower economic bracket - and because they are *more ethnically homogenous* - they are more likely to encounter similar problems and be subject to the same social stereotypes’ (my emphasis).

This construction of the UK's British Muslim populations as more ‘ethnically homogenous’ provides a rigid popular understanding of Bangladeshi Muslims and South Asian Muslims more generally. The Bangladeshi community therefore are often depicted in negative terms of deprivation, fundamentalism, youth militancy, patriarchal sexism, criminality and traditional values. This pathologisation, as argued earlier, is well established “common knowledge”, a stereotype that British Indian Bengalis are well aware. For Bengalis, the British Bangladeshi Muslim symbolise what Haylett describes as being ‘culturally burdensome’²⁶ within ‘dominant representational fields of media, politics and academia’ (Haylett 2001: 351).

British Indian Bengali's need for exacting disassociation suggests an anxious and defensive subject, where lies a fear of *their* ‘Bengali’ identity being mistaken for being British Bangladeshi-Bengali. The negative pathology that is ascribed to Muslim Bangladeshis, causes a self-protective angst about being perceived as “middle class”, “tolerant”, “liberal”, “secular” and “educated” non-Muslim and non-Bangladeshi - Bengali (and most often Hindu) Indians. British Indian Bengalis were not alone in their asserting their “modern” middle class respectability, Haylett describes how the middle class position themselves as ‘modern’ with a dependency of working class ‘backwardness’ and lifestyles and values that were deemed ‘unmodern’ (Haylett 2001). These methods were a means to construct their own identity as ‘modern multicultural citizenship’ (2001: 365). This strikes many similarities amongst the Indian Bengalis who also consider themselves to “be modern”. In their endeavours to portray their own “modern” values contribute in hyper-traditionalising Bangladeshi Muslims. Bengalis’ often dissociate with themselves from Bangladeshi Muslims, while at the same time

²⁶ Although Haylett uses this term in the context of ‘white working-class’ as seen by the ‘middle class’.

confirming essentialising stereotypical imaginings helping to support Bangladeshi Muslims' position as at being at odds with mainstream society.

This articulation of distinction from specific South Asian groups has some resonance with the British white middle classes, although the object and the mode of distancing has manifest itself differently. The disposition of the white middle class in Britain has been characterised in terms of a complex matrix of 'anxiety and uncertainty' over status, 'unease' at privilege, 'acquisitiveness', 'liberal tolerance' and 'civic values' (see Reay et al 2007; Sayer 2002 and Vincent and Ball 2006). Class inequality was felt to be embarrassing and shameful by the middle class in Britain and explicit reference to social class was repressed from the 1980s (Lawler 2005). Strategies of "recoding" or "re-routing" saw a shift away from reference to class but onto representations of the 'Chav, 'Ned' and/or 'white trash' (Skeggs and Wood 2004). These figures of mockery and disgust demarcate the extreme end of the class spectrum and work to differentiate middle class 'respectable whiteness' from the 'whiteness of the lower classes' (Sayer 2002). These figures embody a condensed form of a series of older working class stereotypes such as 'dole scroungers', 'excessive breeding', 'excessive consumption' of branded goods and being 'vulgar' (Tyler 2008; Lawler 2005 and Sayer 2002).

Raisborough and Adams (2008) note that recent accounts of class have come to the realisation that economic positioning is no longer a 'secure and reliable' measure of class boundaries. This has led to the strengthening of valuing social and cultural capitals, a defining characteristic of both British Indian Bengali and British White middle classes. For both groups boundary formation has had specific groups within its sights and has a strong 'racialising' (Tyler 2008) dynamic. For the white middle classes, the 'Chav' is depicted almost always as white, 'forever placed at the borders of whiteness as socially excluded; the economically redundant' (Nayat 2003: 82: 102-3). Likewise, as discussed earlier for Bengali middle class, the "traditional South Asian" take on a similar role with a particular focus on Bangladeshis, with additional dimension of religious prejudice. Both middle class groups mark out these other groups as 'hypervisible' (Tyler 2008: 25) whether they are perceived to be the 'unsullied urban' 'underclass' (Nayat 2003: 102-103; Tyler 2008: 26) or 'extremists' (Glover 2005) with an 'underclass status' (Alexander 2000: 16-17), turning them into recognisable figures.

They have been given further shape through news media, films and literature, through vilification and mockery (see Tyler 2008).

Representations of ‘chavs’, Bangladeshis Muslims or “traditional Asians” have generated figures which depict ‘chavettes’ as vulgar, repellent objects (Tyler 2008; Lawler 2005), “traditional Asian” women are regarded a source of pity, ‘helpless’ living within a ‘domineering’ and ‘patriarchal’ culture (Alexander 2000, Dwyer, C. 1998 and Parmar 1984) as discussed above. Muslim and ‘chav’ masculinity are both painted in terms of a working class criminality with the added dimension of Islamic fundamentalism for Muslim men (Alexander 2000) and racism for ‘chavs’ (Lawler 2005). Both middle class British Indian Bengalis and white British endeavour to normalise and situate their own lifestyles within the context of their structural location within Britain. As middle class groups they are both able to deploy generic class resources (Lareau 2003). Certainly Lamont and Lareau (1988) confirm this through Bourdieu’s relational analysis where cultural preferences and attitudes of the dominant class (middle classes) constitute the ‘legitimate culture’. Whilst cultural preferences of the ‘dominated class’ (working classes) make up the ‘dominated culture’ is regarded as ‘empirically insufficient’ as ‘dominated groups have their own standards and sets of norms which can be relatively autonomous from the dominant ones (Grignon and Passeron 1985, Hebdige 1979, Horowitz 1983, Willis 1977)’ (Lamont and Lareau 1988).

However, for the Bengali middle class ‘race’ (as well as caste, religion and gender) ‘inflects’ (Archer 2010) the nature and distribution of capitals. Archer also argues, that the ‘conditions’ under which individuals and groups are able to operate are affected by racisms (2010). Whilst Bengalis’ class resources *may* defend them against being seen as a “traditional Asian” they are still subject to a ‘race’ based scrutiny. Bengali’s must work disproportionately harder to prove their ascendancy from negatively viewed South Asian social practices. Strategies to present themselves as “modern” are an important tool in the British Indian Bengali middle class armoury of distinction.

For Bengalis using the term “modern” was a way to distinguish themselves from “traditional” *others*, in an attempt to produce social identities through the “modern”. Pigg (1996) proposes that modernist dichotomies become steadied and superimposed

upon a less clear cut social terrain where people are not easily sorted into polarised categories and groups. Bengalis in constructing this “modern” find ways to specify *their* particular ‘modernity’ (Schein 1999: 367-369) and use cultural practices as a way to distance themselves from associations of the traditional, consigning their traditions to the past. Therefore markers of Indian Bengali groups such as caste, ethnic and religious endogamy were losing their potency, in favour of education, middle class homogeneity. The desirability of “high culture, “romance,” “love” before marriage for example were important markers of “being modern” where “traditional” South Asian cultural practices were distanced from their own accounts of their lives, regardless of their experiences.

Representations of Islam in the British media and portrayal in cinema and television characterised Islam as a threat to “British modernity” and “liberalism”. For Hindu and Christian Bengalis this often fitted into stereotypes, prejudice and classifications they had of Muslims. Their assertions of being “modern” were to distinguish and distance themselves from this stereotype. Hart notes that many authors working in urban Turkey observed that many of their informants were self-conscious of the politics of ‘modernity’, especially in relation to the manifestation of the role of Islam and secularism, through visual representation and social and economic practices (Hart 2007). Certainly the Bengalis share this awareness.

Konchita was a first generation Bengali woman who worked as a teacher in an inner city school in London. In India she had studied Bengali at college and after she had completed her studies her parents had arranged her to marry her husband Ranjit, who was at the time studying to become a chartered accountant. She arrived in Britain within a year of being married. When she arrived she soon entered work, after several white collar jobs in offices and the local government, she decided on a change in career path where she decided to train to become a teacher. She was a keen member of various Bengali organisations, centred around *pujas*²⁷ and cultural events. She had two adult children, a son and daughter who had successfully completed their university education in Information Systems and Sociology respectively. Konchita had often told me of her anguish of Bangladeshis, who she felt made it difficult to use the term Bengali without

²⁷ A puja is the religious ritual and worship of a Hindu deity or distinguished person. Pujas can be practised at home, in a temple or in larger venues. Indian Bengali’s most prominent of which is Durga Puja, the annual worship of the goddess Durga.

further explanation and distinguishing oneself from the Bangladeshis who were attending the school she taught at.

Konchita

I look at the school register, and I saw that *they* [British Bangladeshis] all have free school dinners and when I ask them where their parents are, they say *Abha*²⁸ [father] is working at the restaurant. They give Bengalis a bad name; I always have to distinguish myself from *them*. They are living off the state, that is wrong . . . the girls [wives/mothers] are nice, they are so young, married to old men it is horrible. They don't know much English, they live in their world away from the outside, they don't mix. I help them when I can with forms and problems.

British Indian Bengalis often framed “traditional” South Asian women in terms of victims and social backwardness; echoing ‘western’ colonisers, who utilised the ‘plight of Oriental women’ as a characteristic of the savagery and depravity of the colonised. This was used as a justification for citing their own ‘civilised’ superiority lamenting the condition of women as a clear symptom of backwardness (see Graham-Brown 1988). British Indian Bengalis, thus presenting an inherent dichotomy between “traditional” elements of South Asian culture, particularly amongst Islamic groups, and their British Indian Bengali “modern” attributes; which was used to articulate a distinct and separate discourse to accommodate “being modern” within the context of their own historical and cultural experiences.

Despite the growing numbers of Bangladeshi second generation entering higher education, being English-speaking, entering professional and white collar employment, differentiation was maintained and heightened amongst the Bengalis in response to media portrayals of poverty amongst South Asians, Islamic fundamentalism, forced marriages, dowries, caste, honour killings, stories about patriarchal South Asians.

Maira’s observations in the US, where she argues that South Asians of all backgrounds in particular contexts have been merged into an undifferentiated ‘Muslim’ threat, becoming objects of suspicion, surveillance and violence. This was also salient in the British context, which for many Bengalis fuelled their need to distinguish themselves

²⁸ “Abha” is the term for father by Bengali Muslims in Bangladesh.

further, so that there was no mistaken identity. Alexander (2008: 3-4) also establishes how in Britain there has been a series of events²⁹ that led to the demonising of Muslims.

Let us also not forget that it is all South Asian communities, cultures and identities that are under scrutiny in the debates around citizenship and cohesion, faith schools, marriage practices (the ongoing debates around forced marriage and honour killings), language practices in the home, religious Fundamentalism, who supports England in the World Cup ... the list is endless. Of course, racial violence, abuse and murder continue to cut across all communities. (Alexander 2008: 4)

This, as Alexander observed, led to the separation of South Asian communities (2008: 5), further accentuated amongst Bengalis because of ‘preservationist or reactionary rather than interested in social justice or social transformation’ (5). This indistinguishable ‘Muslim’ threat brought to the fore by organisations such as the Hindu Forum (Hundal, *The Guardian* 2006) who did not want to acknowledge a pan South-Asian identity, with its many shared cultural experiences.³⁰ Roger Ballard, director of the Centre for Applied South Asian Studies at Manchester University, argued that there was a growing polarisation on religious grounds, chiefly between Muslims and non-Muslims (Nagarajah, *The Guardian* 2005).

This explains the Bengalis’ attempt to separate and/or dissociate their *Bengali* “culture” from *traditional* South Asian social practices and structures. Bengalis detaching the “traditional” from their identity were attempting to avoid the notion of being grouped together with “undesirable” elements of being South Asian. Like Sivanandan’s work (2000) where a discourse of culture was being reworked by South Asians to conflate with religion, which was problematic in itself (Alexander 2008: 5), Bengalis were attempting to move out of these broader social confines, searching for less restrictions of ‘community’ boundaries. The second generation have attempted to define and redefine themselves in terms of their ethnicity but moving towards markers of “modern,” middle class identification. The following chapters intend to reflect this.

²⁹ The Satanic Verses affair; the Gulf War demonstrations, the Bradford riot of 1995; the riots of 2001 across the northern mill towns; the London bombings of July 2005; the black and Asian troubles in Lozells; the Danish cartoons fiasco; the ‘terror raids’ on the house in Forest Gate in London; and the shooting of Abdul Kahar.

³⁰ Certain contexts, however, do seem more conducive to using ‘Asian’ as a unifying category. As seductive as a utopian ‘Asian culture’ might be, then, one has to examine the contexts that are conducive to a shared ‘Asian’ consciousness, those that are not and why.

In chapter 2, *Contextualising British Indian Bengalis*, I introduce the British Indian Bengalis and examine their particular migration narrative and the impact this has had on the identity marker of “Bengali”. This chapter also explores methodological issues, particularly being an ‘anthropologist at home’.

Chapter 3, *The Second Generation* gives a contextual description of the second generation as it pertains to their lifestyles, work and social practices. It also examines how they relate to mainstream ‘white’ British society as well as other ethnic minority groups.

Chapter 4, *Trying to Become Bengali* traces the journey taken by several second generation Bengalis who searched for a group identity. Many from the second generation had reported moving away from essentialist notions of “being Indian” or “Bengali”. They were, however, at the same time reflecting on what it meant to be *Bengali* and “Bengali culture”. The Tagore Centre set up a Youth Forum specifically for the second generation³¹. This chapter examines the situations that developed from attempts by the second generation to find and construct a second generation “Bengali” space in an environment where Bengali youth were increasingly devaluing the significance of ethnic markers.

Although able to access both men and women in the field, this thesis dedicates chapter 5, *Women and “Being Modern”* to second generation women. There has been a growing body of literature that charts the relationship between gender relations and the construction of nationalism. Mosse (1985), Enloe (1989), Chatterjee (1990) and Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989; 1992) have identified how women’s sexual moralities were defining nationalistic projects. Of central importance were their roles as women in ethnic and national discourses, which included: their reproductive role as biological ‘producers’; their function as cultural national reproducers and bearers of ‘honour’. This discourse has been somewhat amplified within subsequent South Asian diasporic literature, which has depicted women as representing their community as “conservative”

³¹ The Tagore Centre was set up in 1985 to celebrate the life and works of Rabindranth Tagore. Tagore was a Nobel laureate poet, writer, educator, philanthropist and philosopher. He was born in 1861 and the most prolific Bengali writer to date.

holders of “tradition” (Mand 2008; Maira 2002; Dwyer, C. 2000; Bradby 1999; Jhutti 1998; Gillespie 1995).

Chapter 6, *Love and “Modern” Respectability*, investigates the desirability of love amongst the second generation who consider love and romance to be demonstrative of notions of “being modern” and middle class even where there is parental involvement. Romantic love has become a vessel by which Bengalis can dissociate themselves from “traditional” South Asians, which marks their “agreeable” middle class credentials in Britain away from “undesirable” South Asian marriage practices. This chapter also examines the inconsistencies and contradictions that present themselves in the lives of the second generation. This chapter and the subsequent chapter intend to illustrate how marriage is central to understanding how ethnic boundaries or indeed class was reproduced and maintained.

Chapter 7, *Marriage Selection*, considers the influences and criteria that second generation use in selecting a marriage partner. Increasingly the second generation were marrying outside of their caste, regional-language and religious groups. The second generation were in search of alternative criteria, particularly expressed in terms of class, which, in many cases overrode “traditional” considerations. However, their choices were not without contradiction and anxiety as situations arose which put the second generation under pressure to present themselves and their choices as “modern”.

To this end, it is important to introduce the British Indian Bengalis involved in this study and how I situated myself within this study itself.

Chapter 2

Contextualising British Indian Bengalis

My research was intensively carried out during 2000 to 2002 in and around Greater London and the surrounding counties mostly within the London Commuter Belt, where most of my respondents lived and worked. My respondents consisted of 129 first and second generation British Indian Bengali men and women. I asked all the respondents how they felt about the term “British Indian Bengalis”, *all* respondents, some with added clarifications and explanations felt that it was an accurate description of their *ethnic* identity.

‘Bengali’ ownership

British Indian Bengalis considered themselves as a distinct group in their own right. As British Indian Bengalis, they are just one of many regional-language groups within the Indian diaspora; and as Indian Bengalis they represented a minority Bengali group in comparison to the larger British Bangladeshi Bengalis. At present Indian Bengali migrants, and their descendants, in Britain appeared to be either ignored as a specific ethnic group or confused with the Bangladeshis, leaving them in a very ambiguous position.

In the past, as new migrants to Britain, these Bengalis represented a ‘minority within a minority’ (Al-Rasheed 1995: 10). Al-Rasheed’s work on Iraqi Assyrian Christians in London exemplifies the circumstances of Indian Bengalis, who on their arrival to England saw no ‘advantage’ could be gained in their being recognised as a distinct ethnic group. They kept a fairly low profile, which was represented in their status as a minority within minorities. As with the confusion of Iraqi Assyrian Christians with either Arabs or Muslims, so Bengalis saw no ‘advantage’ in being viewed as a distinct group and hope to avoid being confused with the Bangladeshi community, and hid under descriptions of “Indian” or “South Asian”. However, first generation Bengalis have created ‘community’ groups and associations that specifically mention “Bengalis” or have Bengali-associated names such as Tagore. Aspects such as “Hindu” or “Indian” in the website by way of explanation are mentioned.

They were described as “Indian” for the most part in British society; notable exceptions were when meeting other South Asians and/or people who were perceived to be aware of the diversity within India. On these occasions, as determined by the individual, they may describe themselves as Bengali, with the proviso that it was “relevant and appropriate” to do so. The popular construction of ‘Bengali-ness’ was associated with being Bangladeshi and not inclusive of Indian Bengalis (Gardner and Adbus 1994; Eade 1990; Peach 1990). Indian Bengalis said that they were often confused with the Bangladeshis or, in Britain, amalgamated simply within the term ‘Indian’ (Gardner 2002)³². It was often felt by many British Indian Bengalis that the term “Bengali” in the British imagination had become synonymous with the British Bangladeshis alone, although this was a category British Indian Bengalis felt that they were equally entitled to. The term ‘Bengali’ was no less relevant in Britain to British Indian Bengalis than it was in India, contrary to Gardner’s suggestions of redefinition of the term *Bengali* (Gardner 2002: 2)³³. British Indian Bengalis expressed that the term “Bengali” was an essential part of their ethnicity, but then also accepted that Bangladeshis considered themselves ‘Bengali’.

It was understood by British Indian Bengalis that British Bangladeshis and themselves were both peoples of Bengal that were divided through partition, while East and West Bengal were separate states, they were both *Bengali* states. There would be times where the two, i.e. Indian Hindu Bengalis and Hindu Bangladeshi Bengalis may come together, for example on religious occasions such as *Durga puja*³⁴, where individuals may go “*puja* hopping”; or Bengalis in general coming together on a cultural occasion such as celebrating a Bengali poet, author, singer, etc. who were seen to belong under the banner of being simply “Bengali” and was not further divided by nations or religions. Outside of this, in Britain, it was not unusual for British Indian Bengalis to differentiate themselves from Bangladeshi Bengalis, when this was desired the term *Indian* was often added to make that distinction.³⁵ “Bengal” was a state and “Bengali” is the language description not just a national identity, as Gardner (2002) appears to be suggesting. As Poulter argues, the ‘category of ‘Indian’ clearly could not encompass

³² While Gardner (2002) in her description of ‘Bengali’ acknowledges that it also refers to Indian Bengalis as well as Bangladeshis, she says that the term ‘Bengali’ is only a term that is referred to people from “West Bengali, *in India*” (my emphasis).

³³ To suggest otherwise would strip British Indian Bengalis of their ethnic identity.

³⁴ Durga pujas were held by Indian Bengalis as well as small groups of Bangladeshi Hindu Bengalis.

³⁵ See below for discussions on the reasons for differentiation.

crucial differences in religion, language, nor place of origin' (Poulter 1998: 8), urbanisation, class, caste and experiences of migration (Bhachu 1985).

In Zenner's account (1987) of different Jewish immigrant groups claiming a common identity, he explains how different forms of a common identity can arise through different settings, histories and experiences. His line of reasoning was very cogent and relevant to the case of the Bangladeshis and the Indian Bengalis in Britain. Even though the Bangladeshis and Indian Bengalis shared an identity name in common (i.e. "Bengali") the disparate nature of the two ethnic identities in Britain made it an incomplete and fragmentary description. Indian Bengalis in Britain felt that distinguishing the two groups was an essential part of defining their own identity. Mahua a first generation, middle class, Hindu woman in her late forties gives her reason for distinguishing the two groups.

Mahua

You have to distinguish [between Bangladeshis and Indian Bengalis in your thesis], you have to because that community is totally different, British Muslims have been brought up very orthodox, isn't it. Their families are different, our families are totally different. You have to make a distinction, religion, different religion, when you are socially mixing making friendships, then that time religion doesn't come into it or orthodox or whatever. If you have to marry someone Muslim, you have to be a Muslim, a convert; they will give you a new name, so you have distinguish.

The complexity of ownership of the term "Bengali" in Britain was particular and localised to Britain. The Bangladeshi Bengalis, Indian Bengalis argued, were sharply polarised through migration to Britain. They spoke of the undesirability of being described as "Bangladeshi". Mishti, a second generation woman in her mid-twenties, university educated, working in the city in the IT sector, living in the suburbs with her parents and looking to buy property of her own. Mishti discusses her automatic reaction to being confused with Bangladeshi Bengalis:

Mishti

When I am in India, I can say that I am Bengali, because people will understand that I am from Bengal, there is no mistake. However if I say that I am just 'Bengali' in this country [England], people will think that I am Bangladeshi. I always

have to explain myself. I am Bengali but I am from West Bengal – in India. Look, there is nothing wrong with being Bangladeshi, but I am not Bangladeshi. I am an Indian Bengali! In Britain, I sometimes say that I am Indian, and just keep to that, and when I am being specific I will say that my family is from Bengal or Kolkata. But it is like saying you are European, how can that be enough? Europe has many countries in it, India has many states, and those states are as distinctive as those countries with very important differences. I hate having explain it, I am Bengali, I am Indian, and I am British; how much information should I have to give out? I am many things.

Being described as “Bangladeshi” was to unleash in Bengalis a number of automatic distinguishing comments, especially from the significantly larger group of British Bangladeshi Sylhetis. By virtue of sharing the identity name of “Bengali”, Indian Bengalis in a need to assert their Indian identity but also their “cultural prestige” and distinction from a “Muslim,” “lower class” identity felt compelled to define and locate their position in opposition to Sylhetis specifically and other “traditional” South Asians generally. Reports such as those conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation were well publicised in the press and caused further anxiety in being associated with such reports:

Analysing official figures, the foundation found vast differences in child poverty among different groups. One in four white children live in poverty, compared with 74% of Bangladeshi children, 60% of Pakistani children, and 56% of black African children. (Dodd 2007, *The Guardian*)

While the British Indian Bengalis did not see themselves as possessors of a completely unique *Bengali* culture³⁶, they felt a need to distinguishing themselves from British Bangladeshi Bengalis to signal their middle class credentials. The British Indian Bengalis’ process of distinction also involved trying to substantiate their “difference” through known “facts” such as Bangladesh was a predominantly Muslim country with a population of 110 million, out of which eighty-two per cent are Muslim (Eade 1990), while Indian Bengalis tended to be predominantly Hindu (Inden and Nicholas 1977: xi)³⁷. Secondly, while most Bangladeshis in Britain spoke a Sylheti (a language

³⁶ Which is empirically rare, see: Barth (1967).

³⁷ Also Christians, and to a lesser degree Buddhists and Muslim Indian Bengalis, which were a group that I rarely came across, especially the British Indian Bengali Buddhist community and beyond the scope of

community), most Indian Bengali migrants spoke what they referred to as “standardised colloquial Bengali”.³⁸ Which they believed further highlighted the rural-urban divide between them. Thirdly as a migrant group: ‘ . . . they [the Bangladeshi community] differ significantly from . . . other South Asian populations’ (Eade 1990: 481.), being more similar to Pakistanis Miripuris’ (Ballard 1990: chapter 10). First generation British Indian Bengalis who had, in the main entered Britain as students or professionals had experienced different life stages/courses³⁹ than many of their Bangladeshi counterparts; who had come to Britain predominantly as a consequence of the ‘demand for unskilled industrial labour by British industry’ (Gardner 1992).

Disassociation was also linked to the distinctive presence and image of the British Bangladeshis, especially in areas such as Tower Hamlets. Tower Hamlets, was well known to Indian Bengalis, as an inner city borough, where a substantial Sylheti *community* resided. While Tower Hamlets was recognised by the British Indian Bengalis as having a rich cultural heritage it was also viewed in negative terms directly apportioned to Bangladeshis. A UK Polling Report characterised Tower Hamlets:

Wards like Bromley-by-Bow are over 70% social housing, mostly Bangladeshi Muslims with around half the population in social classes DE and one in five residents born in Bangladesh. (Wells 2010)

The first generation would supplement reports like this with firsthand experiences of their dealings with Bangladeshi Sylhetis through their encounters as interpreters, advocates, teachers, social workers or medical support. Indian Bengalis by way of spatial distinction lived far from the inner city, out in the suburbs reflecting the social distinction that they wished to make.

this study. The British Indian Bengali Muslim community again is a relatively small group, and one that I didn’t come across very often and did not explore. See Inden, R.B. and Nicholas, R.N. (1977).

³⁸ This contradicted assertions such as: “‘Bengali’ speakers were in effect Sylheti speakers” (Brah 1996: 68), which may be correct for the majority of Bangladeshis in Britain, but not those who come from Dhaka (or indeed any other part of Bangladesh) or West Bengal. While Brah may have been referring to the Bangladeshi community from Sylhet, where ninety-five per cent of the migrants from Bangladesh are from Sylhet (*House of Commons 1986-7* in: Gardner 1995: 2), she not only makes the assumption that all Bengalis speak Sylheti, but also, all Bengalis are Bangladeshi and from Sylhet.

³⁹ To see further discussion on life stage and courses see Gardner, K. (1995)

Diversification of boundaries

Rather than the British Bangladeshis *per se* (and depending on whom one spoke to), the British Bangladeshi Sylheti Muslims in particular were singled out and viewed as “different to us”. Indian Bengalis often expressed that they as a group were very different from Sylhetis, who form a large majority of the Bangladeshi community. Although, there is evidence of substantial economic and educational success amongst British Bangladeshis (see Dwyer, C et al. 2008; Eade and Garbin 2006 and Alexander 2000), many of my informants maintained a rather stereotyped view of “Bangladeshi Muslims”. Ranjana, a first generation, professional woman in her fifties, describes a common expressed need to differentiate between the two groups of Bengalis.

Ranjana

Bengalis from Dhaka are similar to those from Calcutta. It is difficult to mix with Sylhetis; you have to match everyday life with their everyday life. For example, my husband and I both wanted them [*their children*] to go to university. They [*Bangladeshis*] don't agree with them going to school-expectation going to learn sewing, earn money. It is hard for them – difficult outlook, it will change their lifestyle and background. Expectations of their parents are similar to the expectations of their own parents.

Aside from individual friendships, social mixing between British Bangladeshi Sylheti Muslims and British Indian Bengalis tended to be limited. British Indian Bengali respondents, however, did not feel this way towards British Bangladeshi Hindus or those from Dhaka (even Muslims), who were considered “educated,” “urban,” “middle class” and “cultured”. British Bangladeshi Hindus, whilst having a separate “community” identity to British Indian Bengalis, were considered similar to them in many ways, especially through a shared Hindu identity. It was common for both British Bangladeshi Hindus entering British Indian Bengali spaces and vice-versa. *Durga puja* was a prime example where Indian Bengalis would go to several different locations for the days of *puja*, including the *puja* in East London, near Mile End tube station, which was owned and run by Bangladeshi Hindus. It was a well regarded *puja* and often described in terms of being “authentic” and without the pretensions of many other Indian Bengali *pujas*.

The sharing of religion in this particular context allowed the creation of a “Bengali space” which was meant to represent *Hindu* Bengalis from India as well as Bangladesh,

in this particular context. Because so many of the Indian Bengalis would have either had family in Bangladesh presently or in the past, or have lived there themselves they felt very much akin to one another, especially through the Hindu religion. Christian Bengalis from both countries also met in religious contexts.

Those from Dhaka would also be considered as more acceptable, regardless of religion, especially if this was reinforced by perceived education, class and “culture” of and individual. An educated, middle class, “cultured” Bangladeshi would be considered more favourably, and the wish to associate with that individual or group might be stronger. These groups may meet in the context of work, as colleagues, through a “cultural evening” or events where there was a celebration of Bengali artists, such as *The Arts Worldwide Bangladesh Festival*. Indeed, their bringing together would be celebrated in the sharing of a *Bengali* aspect of *culture*. This sharing of culture with Hindu Bangladeshis (also sometimes with Bangladeshi Muslims, usually not from Sylhet) was reflective of the Indian Bengalis’ selective attempts to acquire and preserve middle class cultural capital in the context of British migration.

Bengali migration and settlement

There is no specific literature with reference to Indian Bengali migration to Britain⁴⁰. The census perhaps highlights the relative invisibility of British Indian Bengalis as an ethnic group. Although the 2001 British Census was able to explain that 2 per cent of the population of England and Wales were Indian, the figures were not broken down further into regional-language based identities. While London does have a proportion of 4.1% Hindus, there was no breakdown of language or regional affiliation, making it difficult to establish how many Indian Bengalis there were. The lack of specific mapping of British Indian Bengali migration to Britain was perhaps best discussed within the context of broader literature, which could be used to contextualise Bengali’s migration to the United Kingdom. Ballard and Ballard (1977) note that there were variations of settlement patterns amongst Indians, however they stated that regardless of variations of settlement patterns that there was an underlying pattern of four phases (21-

⁴⁰ Although Ray (2004) has written a comprehensive study on the food habits of middle class Indian Bengalis who migrated to the United States of America.

23). The first stage was the arrival of male migrants who worked as merchants in British cities.

The practice of migrating abroad for work, Parekh (1994) notes, began in 1830, with the abolition of slavery in 1833 there was a dire need for labour. South Asian migration to Britain dates back as far as 1873 (Salter 1873 in Ballard and Ballard 1977: 22-3; Visram 1986), but major South Asian migration followed the Second World War where Britain experienced an economic boom resulting in a serious shortage of labour (Brah 1996; Anwar 1985; Ballard and Ballard 1977). Labour-hungry Britain actively recruited workers from the Caribbean, workers also made their way from India and Pakistan, mostly during the 1950s and 1960s, these men were employed in heavy industry with low pay (second phase of settlement), leading to mass labour migration, - 'chain migration' (Brah 1996; Ballard and Ballard 1977).

Because of economic aspirations, the labour migrants were 'demographically unbalanced, with a preponderance of young men who were often unmarried' (Robinson 1991: 95), however slowly increasing in newly married and a few with young families. 'In general they were imbued with a "spirit of adventure" and with desire for "making new beginnings," as several put it' (Khandelwal 2002: 92). Although there were also women who worked in areas of transport, nursing and some service industries. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the 'White' population increasingly feared job losses, houses and the fear that their country would be "swamped (Hinnels 2000: 80). Literature in the 1960s reflected this concern and pondered on how long immigrants were going to stay and if they could assimilate (see Desai 1963). Following race riots and election wins for candidates that were "tough on immigration," there were a series of legal measures to restrict entry into Britain, beginning with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, which saw the decline of Indian labour migration. The absence of women in academic literature in the phase of settlement was notable.

However this gender differential was addressed after the introduction of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, which was responsible for the third phase of Indian migration to the UK, 'family reunification' (Khandelwal 2002: 95-97). This phase saw the migration of women and child dependants, the recreation of households and creation of new ones with the migration of fiancées and new brides, redressed the male-female

ratio. Where previously there had been high number of young men, there was now a change in the emphasis of migration, being more family orientated. With the arrival of women came the domestication of British space, including the bringing of religious issues to the fore. Although Hindus developed places of worship outside the home much later, Hinnells argues, because of the 'home base of Hinduism' (2000: 80). The first generation began to purchase housing, paving a way to a more permanent stay.

Ballard and Ballard's fourth phase of settlement was characterised by the coming to adulthood of the second generation, including those who came to Britain as children and those born in Britain. This phase saw the moving from deprived areas to better areas, in the suburbs. Initially literature on South Asian 'culture' was totalising, where socialisation was written of in terms of two different cultures, where studies focused on the second generation's management of being 'between two cultures' (Ballard and Ballard 1977: 43; Watson 1977). Brah addresses the issue of being 'between two cultures' in her work where she argues that they are neither 'encapsulated' in one culture nor the other (Brah 1979: 23-4; 1996: 40-43). Brah's analysis has been acknowledged in the literature that followed that reflected the nuances around cultural practices which were created and negotiated between generations (Khandelwal 2002, Maira 2002, Prinja 1999, Jhutti 1998, Gavron 1997, Gardner and Shukur 1994).

Of my first generation informants that came to Britain a large proportion of male migrants came to Britain as urban professionals, students (Modood 1992: 30-31) or as wives of these men who had at least completed school (equivalent to A' levels), if not a college or university education. There were also a few single women who came as professionals, students or workers themselves 13 per cent. My first generation Bengali respondents reflected that preponderance of middle class professions amongst the first generation, where 96 per cent of first generation men held professional or white collar occupations. These first generation Bengali men entered a number of professions, ranging from engineers, accountants and teachers; a significant proportion of first generation Bengali men and a few first generation women who arrived to Britain from the 1950s onwards were doctors. With fewer immigration restrictions in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s; and a great demand for doctors in the NHS which was not being fulfilled by British medical schools meant that many South Asian doctors migrated to Britain. Rashid states that of the 24 per cent of overseas doctors that made up the NHS,

80 per cent were from the Indian subcontinent (Rashid 1990: 40). Many came to Britain to acquire some postgraduate medical training or postgraduate medical qualification.⁴¹

In this regard the Indian Bengalis bear some similarity with Bhachu's twice migrants Sikhs (Bhachu 1985), in that they are mainly urban and educated. Bengalis came from a variety of middle class backgrounds, but they developed as a defining social group relying on their education as a way of gaining and retaining status and class privilege. Many women furthered their studies on entering Britain, pursuing work either as professionals or white collar workers. A few initially entered blue collar work to earn an additional income to supplement their husband's income.⁴²

Bengalis did not experience the third phase of migration (Ballard and Ballard 1977) of reunification of families, where '[w]hole families and major parts of kin networks . . . reconstituted and all traditional expectations and obligations' (Ballard and Ballard 1977: 33) in the same manner as many other South Asian communities experienced (Ballard and Ballard 1977; Gardner 2002). My respondents commonly came over as single family units, although there was sometimes a widowed mother who accompanied families, but more typically the family was without extended family. The first generation of Bengalis put more efforts into building up their careers, the education of their children and their offspring's careers, rather than creating elaborate and complex Bengali communal infrastructure. First generation Bengalis, were not concentrated in a single immigrant neighbourhood, they were spread throughout London, initially sharing houses with other Bengalis or other Indians and then dispersing in and around London and Greater London, reflecting their needs as they began to marry, have children, to reside in commutable distance to their employment and to have ownership of their own property.

⁴¹ Anwar and Ali provide one of the very few instances where Indian Bengalis were most likely to have been represented in any form of statistics in Britain, found that 8 per cent of overseas doctors spoke Bengali at home with their families (1987).

⁴² Often blue collar work was used as a means to develop language skills or the confidence to speak English before entering into white collar work see *Modern Women* chapter).

First generation Bengali profile

My informants consisted of 48 first generation, 22 women and 26 men. First generation women were aged between 45-60 years of age, first generation men were aged between 50-70 years old. All but one of my first generation informants had been married, two were separated and two were divorced. 85 per cent of the informants had children. All respondents came to Britain between 1955 and 1972. All first generation respondents' parents had been land owners, professional or white collar and regarded themselves as part of the "Bengali middle classes". Even if backgrounds were relatively modest materially, the deep associations with middle class and education that had been developed within India prior to Independence and post-Independence were very prominent in Britain. First generation caste was composed of 36 per cent *Brahmins*, 21 per cent *Baidyas*⁴³, 35 per cent of *Kayasthas* and 8 per cent were *Vaisya*.⁴⁴

Of the 26 first generation male respondents, 18 were professionals, 2 were white collar workers in local government, 3 owned their own business, 1 was an artist who supplemented his income as a travel agent and 1 was a blue collar worker (all bar the blue collar worker had a college/university education). Of the 22 female respondents, all had finished school in India, 12 had gone to college, 3 had come as professionals and 2 had come as single women. Only 4 women did not have paid employment. As a highly educated, professional and white collar group they acquired from moderate to relatively high levels of income. All the respondents spoke English fluently; however interviews were conducted in Bengali, English or a combination of the two.

Most of my first generation respondents were members of various Bengali groups and/or associations; which organised *Durga*⁴⁵, *Kali*⁴⁶ and *Saraswati* pujas⁴⁷, outings and

⁴³ The caste of *Baidya* was a caste particular to Bengal, where descendants were believed to be offspring of a *Brahmin* father and *Vaisya* mother. In terms of social standing Baidyas were ranked next to Brahmins and above Kayasthas (Risley 1891: 46-50). For further discussion of caste see Chapter 6: Endogamy, Homogamy and "Modernity".

⁴⁴ *Vaisya* was a caste associated with the production of wealth through agriculture, animal husbandry or trade.

⁴⁵ Durga Puja is the most important Hindu festival for Bengalis. It consists of a series of five day long rituals welcoming the homecoming of the Goddess Durga. An autumnal festival recalls the power of female Shakti symbolized by the Goddess Durga who slays Asura to re-establish peace and sanctity on earth again.

⁴⁶ Kali is regarded as another manifestation of the goddess Durga. As the legend goes, in battle, Kali was so occupied in a killing spree that she began destroying everything in sight. To stop her, Lord Shiva, her husband threw himself under her feet. Shocked at this sight, Kali stuck out her tongue in astonishment, and put an end to her homicidal rampage. Kali puja falling on either October or November, the main

“cultural” evenings. They were involved in varying degrees. 87 per cent of the first generation was Hindu, and the remaining 13 per cent were Christian.

Second generation Bengali profile

There were 81 second generation informants in this study, 41 men and 40 women. The second generation were between the ages of 18 to 35. 87 per cent of the second generation were born in Britain. 90 per cent of respondents were Hindu and the remaining 10 per cent were Christians. The second generation was comprised of 25 per cent *Brahmins*, 16 per cent *Baidyas*, and 52 per cent *Kayasthas*, 6 per cent were *Vaisyas*. 96 per cent of second generation’s parents were in white collar occupations or professionals; a small group owned their own business (5 per cent).

39 per cent of Bengali informants had been educated at private schools, 18 per cent at grammar school and 43 per cent attending comprehensive schools. The second generation were “encouraged” and expected to attend university, 90 per cent entered higher education, the figure would have been higher if excluding older second generation who came as older children. For those 8 respondents who were born from 1968 onwards, the level of higher education increased further with only 1 person (2%) *not* entering into university. High levels of education were a source of great pride.

The majority of second generation had entered white collar or professional work; including 15 doctors, 11 accountant/finance professionals, 8 IT professionals, 5 dentists, 3 lawyers, also journalists, psychologists, teachers, management consultants, scientists, linguists, marketing and advertising professionals and local government employees. 18 per cent of the respondents were still at university in 2001. Of the 10 per cent who did not enter university, three-quarters were employed in white collar work, working in administration or finance, while the remaining quarter (2 men) worked as skilled tradesmen. 86 per cent had lived away from home, and 66 per cent owned their own property.

purpose being is to seek the help of the goddess in destroying evil - both in the outside world and within humankind.

⁴⁷ Saraswati puja, is the celebration of Goddess Saraswati, who is the goddess of learning.

88 per cent of the second generation stated either directly or implicitly that they had dated. 29 per cent of the second generation in this study were married before the age of 30; and 49 per cent were married after 30. By the age of 35, 80 per cent of the sample were married, and 5 were divorced (4 women and 1 man), 3 of whom (women) had remarried. To date in 2009, 78 per cent of my sample had been married, 4 per cent of unmarried men were openly living with their partners.

All second generation Bengalis spoke fluent English, and varied in their speaking of Bengali at home, varying from speaking fluent Bengali at home, to speaking a mixture of Bengali and English, to replying to parents in English (in answer to their parents' Bengali) to both parents and speaking to offspring in English. The majority spoke to their siblings and other second generation in English although they would periodically fall into speaking Bengali or dropping odd Bengali words or phrases into conversation.

The second generation respondents were also less involved in Bengali religious, cultural or social groups, or other South Asian or cultural organisations than their parents. A few had been a part of university South Asians groups, and many spoke of how they had participated in various organisations as children and teenagers. Although there were a few Bengalis involved in their parents' Bengali organisation, the majority expressed significant disinterest in becoming members of Bengali groups. Involvement was mainly through parents, their attendance of activities were occasional and commonly for social reasons. There was a sizeable presence of second generation at seasonal religious festivals such as *Durga puja*, less so for *Kali* and *Saraswati pujas*. Many attributed their busy lives as students and professional careerists,⁴⁸ reflecting the second generation's links to other social networks outside of Bengali social capital.

As can be ascertained from the above Bengalis were increasingly concentrating their efforts into reproducing socio-economic status and not reproducing ethnic boundaries. High levels of education, less involvement in cultural organisations, late marriage and the presence of divorce were indicative of their efforts to reproduce a "modern," middle class identity. Situating myself amongst the British Indian Bengalis, along with my

⁴⁸ Special events such as weddings, anniversaries, funerals, and other life changing events such as new house, birth of babies and birthdays saw a considerable Bengali turnout.

involvement with higher education was accepted as a part of that middle class respectability within the field.

Methodology

In trying to make sense of my experiences in the field, I was acutely aware of my personal positioning within this thesis which marked my relationship with the second generation. I was a London born and bred, second generation, British Indian Bengali woman who had shared many experiences with other second generation, whether these experiences were about parental expectation; levels of education or childhood memories (of *pujas*⁴⁹, cultural evenings, going to family friends homes for lunches, dinners and parties). I also shared experiences of racism and gender inequality. There was one major difference, the dimension of religion; I was from a Christian family (non-practising). However, for the most part this category carried few conditions to access and acceptance. Those who did not know me, almost always assumed that I was Hindu as my first name and surname did not signal my Christian background. When I revealed my religious background it was met with acceptance. My parents' involvement with *pujas* and cultural evenings, my maternal grandfather being Hindu and my own involvement within the Bengali "community" often left my religious heritage without scrutiny, acknowledging the inclusiveness within which Christianity was regarded amongst a largely *Hindu* Bengali group.

Jotish Biswas, my father, was born in Calcutta in 1939 and one of four brothers. His father, Nandalal Biswas died when he was still only seven. Korrana, his maternal aunt along with her best friend Winifred (Winnie) Thomas⁵⁰ (a missionary from Wales) agreed to share responsibility of bringing up the boys with Sarogini, his mother. Jotish and another of his brothers travelled with Korrana and Winifred to Sylhet Sadar, Bangladesh, (East Pakistan at the time) to dispense medicines and Christianity. When Jotish finished school he began studying at college and also began to study electronics through a correspondence course based in England. Korrana and Winifred felt that Jotish would find practical classes in electronics more helpful and was asked if he

⁴⁹ A religious ritual performed by Hindus. Larger scale *pujas*, such as *Durga puja* and *Kali puja* also have a socio-cultural element within it which sees many other Christian or Buddhist Bengalis in attendance.

⁵⁰ Korrana and Winifred had become good friends since Korrana had been teaching Winifred to speak Bengali.

wanted to study in England, he said yes. In 1962, Jotish with his “Auntie Winifred” travelled by boat from East Pakistan to the Liverpool Docks where he then took a train down to Bayswater, London, to a student hostel - Methodist International House. Jotish then studied electronics, going onto study O’ Levels, A’ Levels and then finally a BSc in Electronic Engineering at Kings College London. After staying in Britain for over 5 years he applied for UK citizenship, which he got. In 1970 on one of his visits to India Jotish was introduced to a beautiful young woman, Mahashweta (Marti) Bagchi, arranged by her elder sister and his elder brother. They agreed to be married and married later that year in December 1970. Mahashweta joined her new husband in Camden, London in April 1971 as a dependant/student. My father worked as an electronics engineer in Central London until his retirement in 2006.

When she first came, Mahashweta worked in various blue collar work while studying English and Maths at the local college, she then brought up two children, myself and later my brother, Raja. We lived in Newham where she worked in various blue collar jobs whilst studying until the mid-eighties where she got a job with Newham Council as an advocate and has worked within this capacity ever since working in Tower Hamlets (as an advocate and youth worker) and Camden (as a health advocate).

I had grown up in Forest Gate, Newham in East London, since my second birthday and had attended the local primary school, Sandringham Primary where I attended a culturally, ethnically and religiously mixed school. I felt I was somewhat of an anomaly being the only Christian Indian in my year (the other exception being my brother, two and half years my junior). I experienced both enriching and empowering experiences in school as a South Asian pupil as well as racism for being brown and confusion from other South Asians for being both Indian and Christian. However, I felt very confident in my own skin living in an ethnically and religiously mixed Newham.

In the late eighties my parents moved to Redbridge, a suburb in Greater London in search for “better schools” for their children. As I entered my new “good” comprehensive school as a fourteen year old in what was (at the time) a predominantly white British area. I was faced with both direct and indirect racist comments and bullying for being a “paki” and was challenged by classmates. My journey through school became more tolerable and enjoyable as I made friends and alliances with

predominantly British white and South Asian pupils. After A'Levels I entered university, studying away from home from the mid-1990s, studying Law with Women's Studies, then an MA in Women's Studies and then embarking on a part-time DPhil in Social Anthropology and a handful of part-time jobs to see my way through my studies.

I was 25 when I married my long term British Indian boyfriend, Pras, whom I met at university. We shared a flat in Brunswick Place, Hove, by the sea and I left soon after to begin fieldwork in London. The prospect of doing research from my parents' home and away from Pras, brought thoughts of both comfort and anxiety in equal measure.

Fieldwork: Arrival into Redbridge

My arrival into Redbridge was a drawn-out process and not a single entrance onto a stage. Redbridge was a London borough of London, located in the North East. Redbridge neighboured London boroughs of Waltham Forest, Newham, Barking and Havering and the County of Essex. It was a convenient place to commute to see various informants, Bengalis people, events, functions and *pujas* in and around London both within East London but also to all other parts of London and the surrounding counties. Although the inability to drive up until that point had made me realise how huge the landscape of London was. My informants were in and around London, including Redbridge itself, Waltham Forest, Enfield, Harrow, Hounslow, Newham, Richmond, Kingston, Sutton, and the counties of Surrey, Kent Middlesex and Essex. Most of these areas were leafy suburbs, predominantly residential and popular commuter areas into central London. A few areas such as Newham were located three miles from the city of London, a vibrantly diverse borough with major ongoing regeneration programs.⁵¹

As Redbridge was not far from Brighton and Hove, and as I was relocating to my parents' home (Marti and Jotish), the transition was not too demanding. It made sense to move there as this was not going to cost me a penny, as it was rent free, I could write, I would be cared for and I would be in a Bengali household which was frequented by other Bengalis and was in easy reach to other Bengalis. To locate myself in the house of a neighbouring Bengali in the area or around London would be considered as extremely bizarre, when my parents lived in the suburbs of London. Arriving back to

⁵¹ I also conducted research in Scotland with a couple of families and in various locations in the North, often following individuals to parental homes from London.

my teenage home was making me a little anxious; I had left my domain of Hove, my part time work in the IT department, “our flat”, the university and most of all, my husband, Pras. However it was a home from home and I had returned to being a daughter of the house. Redbridge was a place I had grown up since I was thirteen, having moved out of Newham; my parents in search of “better schools” for their children. Redbridge was one of the neighbouring areas of Newham, Redbridge like many of my field site areas was greener, more affluent, had better “results” at school, less densely populated⁵² and were more “desirable” areas to live in than inner city boroughs⁵³.

I had over the preceding weeks of the final “arrival” to Redbridge slowly gathered my belongings and placed them in “my room”, although this used to be Raja’s room (my younger brother). It was much smaller than my room used to be, and painted in a warm light brown hue, soft brown carpet a desk, a bed and a cupboard, although my belongings had found its way into any empty spaces going at my parents’ home. I had over the weeks, by car journeys and on other occasions by train and tube, made journeys bringing back various personal belongings to my parents’ home. Although Redbridge had Epping Forest within its borders, I could not say my day-to-day views were breathtaking, any air that I breathed within London were often filtered through dirt and grime that I had never smelt until leaving London. The suburbs were less so. They were clean streets with a sprinkling of trees along pavements, out of semi-detached homes, large terraced houses, the commuters and traffic, like homing pigeons aimed West towards the city of London in the mornings with traffic filling predictably down Redbridge Lane East, from Monday to Friday, building back tens of cars off Redbridge roundabout, whilst the majority of walking commuters weaved their way between the cars to Redbridge tube station to ride on the central line towards the city. Near the station was a convenience store, a pharmacy, a dry cleaner, a florist, a newsagent, a Chinese takeaway and a bakery.

Amongst the travellers were some of my Bengali informants, first and second generation, like many of my informants around London, followed the path of the commuters before them. First generation women dressed in saris and trousers, while

⁵² See: “<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles>” for Redbridge and Newham.

⁵³ Exceptions however were the fashionable areas such as Camden and Islington.

first and second generation men made their way in suits and smart trousers, second generation women dressed in trouser suits, skirts and dresses. Those on the tube on their journeys became invisible behind books, magazines and newspapers; eyes downcast concentrating on literature or catching up on sleep. I followed these bankers, financial analysts, interpreters, advocates, engineers, teachers, dentists, lawyers, accountants, doctors, IT professionals, marketing people and students.

I adopted a network and snowballing approach in gaining contacts, which I was able to establish through friends, parents, family friends, “aunties”, “uncles”, acquaintances, through weddings, *pujas* and organisations. The selection of respondents was not systematic (beyond most being located within Greater London), and there were not obvious reasons why particular families or individuals would not be representative of various castes, various professions and educational backgrounds of the Indian Bengalis in Britain. Although I was in contact and had access to many more British Bengalis and did involve them in surveys and had discussions with them, my 129 Bengalis were those I had undertaken a deeper level of engagement with. Thereafter I kept regular contact with some of my informants and often visited the field, especially in London. I either interviewed on tape or made notes, had in-depth conversations with, had discussions with, were a part of my participant observation (but were followed up with interviews and naturally occurring conversation).

Reflecting on my experiences while in the field, the narratives contained in this thesis attempt to conceive ideas of “being modern”; and how “being modern” was imagined amongst the Bengalis. Bengalis were very pleased that research was being conducted on them as a group, as they often expressed feelings of being misrepresented and an being unrecognised group.

Field Methods

Participant observation

Fieldwork included observing the lives of British Indian Bengalis and engaging fully with groups of Bengalis, including families and individuals. As mentioned earlier, staying long term in the home of other Bengalis in London would be very inappropriate, unless on special occasions. To do otherwise would arouse suspicion and confusion as

to my intentions, i.e. to perpetuate gossip and to interfere with their lives. While it could be argued that by staying at my parents' home, could result in the informants mistrusting (Stephenson and Greer 1981: 124) me when giving information, I am sure that this would equally apply if I were to live away from my parents as my association with my parents will be a natural assumption by British Indian Bengalis. As a British Indian Bengali myself issues of immersion are different: I am already associated with my parents, in my informants' minds. I am not perceived as an outsider in terms of my general "Bengaliness". To counteract the familiarity I adopted 'artificial naiveté' as suggested by Stephenson and Greer (Stevenson: 1981), so as not to take certain aspects of the culture for granted, although unavoidably many informants assumed that I knew things that I did not.

I also observed the unspoken. It is important while in the field to be aware of the issues concerning being an anthropologist at home as highlighted above by Stephenson and Greer, who compiled a list of issues and problems (1981). I observed not only everyday life but also marriage preparations, religious ceremonies, cultural events, weddings, social events mostly within Greater London and surrounding Counties and sometimes around Britain. I re-established my relations with the Bengali Cultural Association based in London and observed various *pujas* and events run by the organisation. I also conducted extensive participant observation with members of the Junior Tagore Centre and its parent The Tagore Centre, who were very forthcoming and enthusiastic about this research.

I also managed to follow a few marriages conducted in Calcutta during fieldwork but intermittently, when in India of British Indian Bengalis and Indian Bengalis. It must be noted that my position as a married woman allowed me greater access to other married women and also allowed for greater participation as there were specific roles for married women within the wedding ceremony and preparations. The fact that I myself had a self-selecting marriage may have on the one hand encouraged certain members of the second generation to feel freer to express desires and wishes about "unconventional" routes to marriage, it may have at the same time effected the way that other second generation young people presented marriages where there was parental involvement, or views on marrying non- Bengalis.

Focus groups

I initiated group discussions explicitly about issues in my thesis. As an articulate group, British Indian Bengalis may directly challenge my assertions and assert their own. I received great interest in my research from British Indian Bengalis themselves and was able to initiate discussions in various dynamics of generation and gender specific groups, but I conducted most of the discussion groups in a non specific gender basis. This would allow me to look at the group dynamics in the context of particular issues and the social dynamics. The Junior Tagore Centre agreed to let me facilitate focus groups with the junior members.

Semi-structured interviews and informal interviewing

While in the field I used conversations to investigate issues in an informal manner. It reduced the restriction of formalised interviewing and revealed underlying issues. This was the ideal forum for allowing for freedom of introducing materials and questions that were previously unanticipated. Also informal interviewing was a good way of sounding out more formal interviews in semi-structured interviews and could work as a filter for inappropriate or less than useful questions.

In semi-structured interviews, themes that have arisen from other methods of informal conversations, participant observation, life histories, documents and focus groups can inform the semi-structured interviews. I left this particular method towards the end of my field research and also used in various follow up questions up until the final draft, to maximise the effectiveness. These interviews could act as a way to gain greater insight and refinement into what has already been observed or to discover and clarify what has been learnt.

Social networks

I established patterns of linkages both formally and informally. My formal networking was through my links made via the Junior Tagore Centre and through members of the Bengali Cultural Associations, which were invaluable resources which widened my networks. Informally I used the 'snowball technique' to produce a sample of men and women; first and second generations and various ages; of married and unmarried status who formed my key and casual informants. Of the key informants my sample included

those of formal statuses and those who have informal positions in networks of social relations and friendship.

Anthropology at home

The ethnographer's task is to balance an external, objective report with an insight into the subjects' own view of the world . . . While some ethnographers explore the workings of cultures different from their own, others have become investigators within their own cultures. (Stephenson and Greer 1981)

There are many names given to study of one's own community: 'anthropologist at home' (Jackson 1987), 'native anthropologist' (Jones 1970) and 'indigenous anthropologist/ ethnologist' (Fahim 1977) to name but a few. However, because of the diasporic nature of this community, "home" can become a problematic issue⁵⁴. Also the term indigenous is very ambiguous as 'native' or an 'indigenous' anthropologist/ ethnographer could mean:

. . . belonging to a specific nation-state. At other times . . . membership in a cultural area or in a specific community. In addition, language, religion, ethnicity, and class at times define the specificity of indigenous status.

Fahim and Helmer argued in their article (1980: 644) that the term "indigenous" be abandoned and that debate focus on the 'identification and comparison of the works of the local and foreign anthropologists'. For the purposes of this research I will use the term "local anthropologist", and I will refrain from using the terms 'native' and or 'indigenous' anthropologist/ethnographer unless used by others.

Evolving and Accepting

It was argued by many scholars that a crisis within anthropology (Hymes 1974; Leach, 1961 as mentioned by Fahim, H.M. 1977; Berreman 1968: 12 Ahmed and Shore 1995:30. Clifford and Marcus 1986: 8) had emerged, 'George Balandier's "situation coloniale" was suddenly visible (1955)', and colonial relations were no longer desired.

⁵⁴ For discussions on the discourse of 'home' and diaspora see: Brah, A. (1996: Ch. 8).

There was a sense that semantics, lives and cultures were appropriated by academics to be processed into ‘units, constructs, concepts.’ (Strathern 1987: 29) This was well illustrated by the students of the University of Papua New Guinea in the late 1970s, when they became concerned with ‘the issue of exploitation by academics and singled out anthropologist for attacks’ (20).

The very existence of anthropology became dependent on the need for a more introspective observation not only in the studying of other cultures, but also in the treatment of anthropology itself. Akbar Ahmed and Chris Shore (1995: 30) argued for a more introspective approach towards anthropology. They believed that as a discipline, anthropology should ‘strive to become what it has always claimed to be: the study of *all* of humanity and not just ‘Other’ cultures’. Many countries began to restrict foreign anthropologists, favouring their own ethnographers (Fahim 1977: 81). From this angst the ‘indigenous’ anthropologist/ethnographer was borne

. . . its [local anthropology] occurrence will benefit anthropology as a whole and may well prevent the “death” of anthropology predicted by some current writers. (Berreman in Jones (1970: 251))

Jackson summarises other factors that has encouraged anthropology at home (1987: 8) decreasing funding; increased student numbers; objections by many new states to research into ‘tribalism’ and a suspicion of neo-colonial intellectual imperialism; the discovery of large areas of ignorance about one’s own society; the current interest shown by historians in using anthropological insights to interpret past records; and the ease of access to one’s own society and reduction of the time and money needed to ‘enter’ the field.

Messerschmidt, editor of *Anthropologist at Home in North America*, asserts that with the proliferation of home anthropology that we could be entering a ‘new “golden age.”’ Messerschmidt, questions the whether anthropology will lose its core definition if it were to embrace the study of one’s own society:

If our basic concern is with archaic or primitive society, as Diamond (1974), Lévi-Strauss (1963: 101 ff.), and others suggest, then pursuing anthropology at home . . . seems to be a contradiction of term . . . if anthropology is the study of human and social conditions .

. . in modern as well as archaic society – then we have a definite role to play . . . (Messerschmidt 1981: 3)

Gulick, as mentioned by Ablon (1977), proposes that anthropology is equally valid as a foreign and local study, and to ignore the local would mean that anthropologists would be unable to ‘contribute, responsibly and professionally, to the reordering of that culture’s priorities’. The growing literature is testament enough of the acceptance of anthropology accepted as a study of people, culture and social structures regardless of the location, times and conditions.

The advantages and constraints of local anthropology

The local anthropologist presents new perspectives and insights into the understanding of their own cultures. However, one has to be warned that the accounts are ‘empowered and restricted in unique ways.’ (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 9) Stephenson and Greer have identified a comprehensive list of issues and problems with anthropology conducted by a local (1981): the problem of pattern recognition; selective reporting – “ordinariness”; ‘advantage of economy in discovery of cultural meaning’; bias in selection of informant; bias in rapport with community; intensified value conflicts and separation of participation-observer role and the problems with disengagement with the field.

Stephenson and Greer (1981) state that the native researcher may ‘fail to see cultural patterns’, taking for granted certain aspect of the culture, or the informant may fail to impart with certain information as they may not ‘occur to them’ (Gwaltney: 1987) that the anthropologist of their community was unaware. Stephenson and Greer state that familiarity as a hindrance can be avoided by the local anthropologist through ‘artificial naiveté’ where the ethnographer catalogues every detail, they feel that in doing so ‘relevant details previously missed may surface’. However, conversely it has been argued that familiarity may ‘aid perception’. This added perception can thus be used as an advantage as the insider can attach meanings to ‘words and acts by participants’, with the added bonus of preventing ‘misunderstandings’:

Talented insiders such as Srinivas (India), Obeyesekere (Sri Lanka), Uchendu (Nigeria) . . . to name but a few, have provided structural

analyses of aspects of their own social systems . . . (Aguilar in Jackson 1987: 25)

The question of whether the local anthropologist is effected positively or negatively in relation to his/her informants is dependant on nature of 'prior knowledge' (Stephenson 1981: 124) of the anthropologist - this may result in trust or mistrust (124). The advantages and disadvantages of knowing the community, and how this affects their roles and the way people relate to them is dependant again on the anthropologist's previous relationship with the community. As Fahim and Helmer argue, the 'rude foreigner anthropologist' (1980: 646) may be tolerated to break norms, however the local anthropologist may not be given that lea way.

The local anthropologist has also to consider the potential role/value conflicts. How ethical issues are intensified where culture is familiar? Greer and Stephenson argue that all anthropologists need to balance between detachment and participation, however the local anthropologist could be more sensitive to the ethical dilemmas of those studied, which foreign ethnographers may not be aware of:

The transition from a nonparticipating [sic] observer to a participating observer cannot happen without the sociologist's exercising all his powers of empathy (Srinivas 1966: 157)

There is one constraint however, that of 'personal identification with the local culture' which may cause bias. If one is known to the community, one risks scrutiny and judgement not only of oneself but of one's family regarding the pursuit of 'unbiased' information. However, a way of objectifying this to some degree is to create a 'physical distance' from the fieldwork, if this is maintained, it forces the anthropologist to 'emerge from his previous role of participant-observer and becomes an impersonal analyst' (Srinivas 1966: 157). This can help reduce the 'challenge of anthropology at home' in regards to the implication of a published work on 'community'. Strathern argues that the ethnographer becomes author in relations to those being studied:

They [the people studied] are familiar with the vocabulary of 'relationships', 'roles', 'community'. What the anthropologist seems to be doing is simply using these ideas in specialist ways. . . People may object to the value put on what they supply. (Strathern 1987: 26)

The ethnographer at home is more likely to be under more scrutiny from his or her own group, as there was a higher likelihood that anything that was published would be more readily available to the people being studied. They could be ‘judged by the local people against the best scholarship . . . No such challenge has existed in the past for most of the world’s anthropologists’, who have worked abroad, where the locals may have been ‘illiterate and uninterested in the wider theoretical framework guiding the work’ (Fahim and Helmer 1980: 653).

There was great interest in my studies from both first and second generation British Indian Bengalis, who would either ask me about what I had “discovered” or make suggestions as to what I could write about. There were lots of interesting dialogue and insights I was able to gather from their discussion with me and each other. In general my work was viewed in a positive light, however there was some nervousness particularly from the first generation that I spoke to about exposing their group prejudices against Muslims, Africans and Caribbean groups. My mother asked me, “But what will they [British Indian Bengalis] think [of my discussion of prejudicial views held by some British Indian Bengalis]?” I shrugged my shoulder and replied:

Ma, I have to do this, this is what it means to study anthropology I cannot hide what I have seen and heard. It is important to talk about the prejudice because that is how people [British Indian Bengalis] especially the first generation talk about these groups. It is important to understand these things.

The second generation more readily acknowledged the prejudices held amongst some British Indian Bengalis of both generations. The second generation, about whom this thesis was largely written about were generally very positive about my discussions on identity, love, romance and marriage choices (although not necessarily in agreement) and were extremely helpful in providing great insight on these matters in regards to their own lives. However, “my analysis” of identity strategies used by the second generation in their everyday lives and marriage strategies may not lend itself to flattery in all cases and I have attempted to disguise the true identity of the individuals I describe in this thesis.

While Messerschmidt's belief that 'participant observation' is to be retained it is probably unwise to ignore the status of being either a foreign or local ethnographer, effectively being a neutral observer⁵⁵. Conaway addresses the idea of the 'neutral researcher' in her essay (1986), although she is talking about the 'façade of a gender-neutral' researcher this appears equally relevant to the point in case of the local and the foreign anthropologist. Under the same assumption, it appears the ethnographer should at least realise his/her status and by accepting the status of local or foreign anthropologist, can anticipate possible problems. Stephenson and Greer clarifies this matter further, arguing that while the problems of the foreign and local anthropologists are not different in 'principles underlying the problems and advantages' (1981), they felt that they may have differed with regard to intensity as the earlier arguments show. It is perhaps worth noting that while Jones (1970: 251) acknowledges that the 'native' anthropologist is identified as a member of the 'ethnic group', this is one aspect of the anthropologist:

. . . native anthropology is only one facet of indigenous anthropology, which may exist between the local researcher and the people studied and focuses on both the epistemological and the operational consequences of these relationships. (Fahim 1980: 644-45)

Ablon quotes Gulick to illustrate how anthropologist perspectives may '[allow] one to be a part of his own culture and, at the same time, to be out of it (Postman and Weingartner 1970: 4 in Ablon 1977).' Anthropologists at home may encounter theoretical concerns and methodological problems, but there are overriding reasons why this area should be encouraged. A local ethnographer can accumulate information, thoughts and sentiments of community members that may be inaccessible to the outsider, new types of information. However, this is not to say that the foreign ethnographer's role is defunct, only that it is not the only 'valid' perspective. Aguilar (1981: 20) argued that 'not even the celebrated Malinowski' was able to describe what it was like to "live" a culture. He believed that 'the native's point of view is yet to enrich our discipline'. A similar view was expressed by Strathern who argued that Malinowski was not necessarily 'author in respect of knowledge of local social interest' (1987: 29) but that it would be foolish to ignore his findings as it was used as a mediation between

⁵⁵ While Messerschmidt admits that 'old ways can be successfully combined with new and different methods' I feel that he has not gone far enough in his analysis. See Conaway (1986).

‘themselves and colonial world in the information conveyed’. Thus each type of ethnography - the local and the foreign - has its values as an intimate and cross-cultural perspective, respectively. Jones argues that neither the local nor the foreign anthropologist can ‘discard’ their perceptions, and that bearing this in mind, one view cannot be ‘any more or less trustworthy than the other’ (1970: 257).

Locating myself

My name and phenotypical features immediately enabled me to gain preliminary trust and access to first and second generation Bengalis that I came across. Having grown up attending *pujas* and cultural evenings, spending weekends and evenings with Bengali family friends, experiencing racism, both subtle and overt provided a context where perceptual gulf between the researcher herself and the researched were reduced. I was not for example regarded as an embodiment of state control or authority (although there was little danger of any researcher being mistakenly identified in this way). For all the advantage I gained in access and trust, it also unveiled the potential struggle and confusion of my life within work. Acknowledging and working through these encounters required understanding where I was positioned and how I positioned myself.

During fieldwork I developed several roles, one such role was that of a daughter of first generation British Indian Bengalis (both literally and as “fictive daughter”) and another was that of a fictive niece to many of the first generation informants. Although a fictitious relationship, it was a common and genuinely felt one, experienced by most second generation Bengalis. When conducting participant observation I was often called upon to participate by both generations in different ways. The first generation asked me to participate in the preparation of *pujas*, disputes or problems that required writing for example, however they also called me for dinner, spent time talking to me and always provided sumptuous meals or snacks when I interviewed or visited them in their homes. My offers to help wash up, set the table or take dishes to the table were often taken up even if the “aunty” did not know me well. There was an ease in exchanges with the first generation, although within the structures of age and authority, where I addressed them immediately as “aunty” or “uncle”, less commonly “mashi” or “mesho” as some second generation did. This allowed for close and affectionate bonds to be established, where I articulated my relationship with them as a “niece” to the first generation which was readily accepted as would most second generation meeting a first

generation member in a social context. This relationship often deepened if I became friends with their offspring (if they had them). Sometimes, first generation women, if their daughters were not married, attempted to enlist me as an ally to “encourage” their daughters to get marry quickly or to ask me to help to find a groom for their daughters, I either politely refused, evaded these requests through discussing difficulties of finding a special someone in one’s life or saying “I’ll keep my eye open”. I sometimes became a mixture of confidante-friend, but always within the structures of age and authority, so they felt comfortable admonishing me if they felt I was doing something I should not, gave me “ideas” or “things” to put into my thesis; but by the same token took care and interest of my personal well being.

My relationship within the second generation was less driven by age and authority, although younger groups of second generation in their teens sometimes referred to me as “didi” and some older members although potentially referred to in terms of older sister or brother, i.e. “didi” or “dada”, by myself. However, authority based on age amongst the second generation was much less adhered to if at all, unless the age difference was significant. My relationship with the second generation was the most relaxed and respondents became the ones I had the most and closest contacts with and who for the basis of this thesis. I was considered either a friend or an acquaintance of the second generation. By second generation, I mean British Indian Bengalis who are the children of migrants. I do not consider them to be a ‘generation’ in statistical terms, but nevertheless “second generation” by birth. Ages ranged from fourteen to forty, these young people and adults were drawn through snowballing techniques, so formed various friendship groups but also individuals known to the group but not friends with them. These friendship groups were subject to change, growing, reducing and disbanding over time, however I was able during my fieldwork to maintain contact with them regardless. I also spoke to those considered “peculiar”, there was an example of a young man who felt driven to find a bride, avoided by women, ridiculed by both men and women and a source of entertainment. I avoided joining in on such occasion and spoke to him, finding him an interesting on his views on marriage and relationships. I found that in speaking to this man I was not restricted in my general observer role, my speaking to him was not seen as a betrayal and my married status and researcher protected me from being seen as a “potential” wife.

I was involved in heated discussions amongst the second generation, my opinion was sometimes sought on a variety of issues including the second generation, life, ideals, sexuality, politics and television and I did not always agree with other Bengalis. However, discussions were seen as a part of gaining a general rapport within the Bengali community. I did not experience any sharply focussed public issues which required “taking a side” that would impact on this study, however I did observe friendship disputes and grudges and refrained from taking a side for the sake of my studies and gaining access to both sides of the dividing line.

Building my relationship with the second generation grew in a variety of ways; I had for example become an established member of the Tagore Centre a year before fieldwork began in earnest, so my “arrival” to the field site was not as a “stranger”. I made my presence as a researcher clear on several occasions and was met with interest. I never encountered suspicion or hostility. Being second generation allowed me to develop relationships with other second generation without much conscious effort, where there was often a growth of friendship and rarely formalities between us, with the exceptions of when I conducted formal interviews, questionnaires of surveys.

My position as a married woman was seen in very favourable terms by the first generation in particular, even though I did not marry a British Bengali, they were pleased I had “at least married a British Indian” who was Hindu and was told by a few that I was a “good example” by marrying at a “good time” or “at a good age”; which was a label I resisted out of embarrassment and also my own belief that it was one option that was “right for me”. Although on one occasion an “auntie” questioned my attitude saying that, “now that you are married, don’t you care about others getting married?” Although some second generation did comment on my marital status in a positive light, most second generation felt disinclined to consider me in this aspirational light. Although many men and women talked about their own desires to get married, most of those who knew me saw my “ability” to marry as “good luck” and a life choice.

In asking people about their own experiences as a single, engaged or married person within the community, inevitable made my own experiences highly relevant. The fact that I had a self selected marriage, with an Indian but non-Bengali was relevant. It was helpful having had a self-selected relationship as many second generation felt more

comfortable discussing illicit or “inappropriate” relationships with me; however, this also made some second generation initially more reluctant discussing relationships which had high levels of parental involvement. However, I emphasised my role as a researcher to gain their trust after which they felt more able to discuss the processes of finding a partner with varying degrees of parental involvement. I recall that one woman in particular who had had boyfriends whom I had met, felt embarrassed about admitting to having agreed to meeting men with parental assistance. However, although she presented her eventual marriage through the language of “being modern”, I had to apply a more critical approach to her presentation of her marriage, recognising how strategies would be adopted in discussing their life with me as an individual.

As a woman I got closer to Bengali women than men in general. However, the acceptance and ordinariness of platonic relationship between genders in the Bengali community meant that I made close friendships with several Bengali men in the field. This allowed me to include and engage them through participant observation, interview, unstructured interviews, conversations and surveys, where they shared their thoughts, feelings and opinions on various topics including women, marriage, loneliness, education, identity, dating and love.

Being from a Christian background on most occasions was either not known or not commented on by many of the second generation, I made no attempt to hide my family history, but felt disinclined to drawing it immediately to their attention, especially as I was not of a religious disposition. Many first generation if they knew of my family, may have known of my non-Hindu credentials. I was usually only asked questions about my religion by two first generation men on two separate occasions were curious to know why my ancestors had converted, but did not question me further. The absence of an issue arising from my being from a Christian background was consistent with Bengali Hindu and Bengali Christian relationships as commented by Donner (2002) and my own observations.

Ultimately, as a British-born second generation married Indian Bengali woman, I could not disconnect the structuring facets from myself as an individual. However, the potential for role conflicts as an anthropologist sharing so many aspects with those she studies is worthy of consideration.

Resolving conflict

Although on the surface, I am essentially an ‘insider anthropologist’ where the British Indian-Bengali community can be described as my *own* ethnic group (Eriksen 1993), it is one of many of the identity categories that I may fall into. Differences such as through schooling, politics, gender, religion, class, worldviews and life experiences posed potential differences. However, there were also second generation with whom the similarities cannot be denied. The problems of familiarity, as discussed above by Stephenson and Greer (1981), can be avoided by adopting ‘artificial naiveté’. I found this difficult. While I was genuinely wide-eyed listening to stories of partition, experiences arrival to Britain and religious rituals from the first generation, this was less plausibly achievable with the second generation. I was around their age, I had lived in London for much of my life, I had dated, I had lived away from home, I had entered further education and I had grown up going to pujas and cultural evenings. However, ‘artificial naiveté’ was achievable with regard to the *particulars* of their lives; I listened to the second generation having a general knowledge about the Bengali community but not the specific facts about that particular person and their level of association or rapport to and with the “community”. In Stevenson’s and Greer’s (1981) of their experiences in Shiloh and Troutdale (respectively), having a ‘general’ knowledge’ of an area was an advantage in developing entry into the field and the rapport, but particular knowledge pertaining to a particular community and people would cause issues. I sought to speak to second generation Bengalis I had not previously known, making new connections through various organisations through membership lists and then snowballing from there.

While I found entering and making connections with the Bengali community relaxed, the exiting of the field was more complex. I retained some connections with Bengalis, which initially brought up potential self restrictions about how I wrote particularly about the negative aspects of British Indian Bengalis. Attempting to untangle myself from value conflicts such as how some Bengalis Indians Hindus and Christians viewed Muslims was important. I needed to present prejudice as prejudice rather than coating them with a sympathetic historical contextual explanation, this acknowledgement helped me gain a better grasp of understanding British Indian Bengalis. Even though I had disagreed with opinions amongst members of my own community there had been

other times where explanations of “difference” between the two communities concealed the prejudice from (*my*) view. Living in Brighton greatly aided my separation from the field, I was able to put some physical and emotional distance between us, where I was writing away from the field and where participation was only occasional. My moving away from Redbridge provided a definable separation from the field to allow for some autonomous reflection. This hardened my reserve to write a faithful account of second generation Bengalis that I encountered in the field who would be able to challenge and refute my claims and presentation I have made here.

Ultimately, Jones (257) argues, there is a potential advantage in ‘native anthropology’. It provides a new perspective which is ‘questioning old assumptions about social processes, developing new ones, exploding old myths, and in the process developing new ones’. Stephenson and Greer state that there are no ‘iron laws’ (1981: 130), and the problems of the anthropologist studying their own community can gain a heightened perspective. It is perhaps unwise to predict a strategy for precisely this reason as there are no ‘iron laws’. I can only be aware of my own predicament and be prepared to be flexible and sensitive to the needs of the group of people I am studying and remain foremost an anthropologist.

I hope this study provides narratives which resonate with the second generation of British Indian Bengalis in regards to their identity, romance, love and marriage strategies. In so doing, it is important to provide a contextual description of second generation lifestyles, work and social practices within British society.

Chapter 3

The second generation

Constructing identity

This chapter draws on ethnographic data to explore how second generation British Indian Bengalis managed their ethnicity and their identity more broadly within their lifestyles, work and some of the social practices. This chapter also examines how the second generation interacted and managed their social lives outside of work, examining who they chose to be friends with, how they related to the “Bengali community”, different ethnic groups and British White society. In much of the dealings the second generation attempted to distinguish themselves through a middle class respectability drawing on categories of “being modern”, “professional” and even in some cases “neutral” in their attempts to signal their distinction from negative South Asian stereotypes.

As a mainly middle class ethnic minority, British Indian Bengali second generation were able to use their class resources, cultural and social capital to negotiate social locations. However, theorisations and studies of ‘Whiteness’ as a privileged identity within the middle classes perhaps allows for further contextualisation of the dimensions of ethnicity and class dynamics. Reay et al. (2007) makes the point that to ‘embody both whiteness and middle classness is to be a person of value’ in a ‘class ridden’ and ‘racist society’ (Reay et al 2007; see also Skeggs 2004). bell hooks (1992) explains how privilege habitually passes itself as an embodiment of the normative. In the British context the middle class was predominantly depicted in terms of being British White. This impacted the way that these second generation professionals presented their ethnicity (and that of other South Asians) within a predominantly British white environment.

Whilst there is a substantial body of literature concerning the analysis of the middle classes in Britain, it has been primarily framed within the context of the white middle classes (Archer 2010). There is little research regarding middle class ethnic minorities in Britain (for notable exceptions examples see: Archer 2010; Dhooleka 2003; and Robinson 1988), let alone a single ethnic group. Phillips and Sarre contend that:

‘Race’ is as invisible in most discussions of middle-class formation in Britain as the middle classes are invisible in most discussions of the class position of ethnic minorities. (1995: 76)

For many of the British Indian Bengali second generation that I spoke to, middle class position required the embodying of good education and then progression to professional employment. This ethos was also reflected in research with the white middle classes (see Archer 2010; Crozier, et al 2008; Brantlinger 2003; see also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977)). However, the second generation also demonstrated an additional self-imposed criterion of: “being modern”, socially ‘liberal’ (Vincent and Ball 2006; Brantlinger et al. 1996) and having a moderate religious conviction.

This self-imposed middle class ideological mindset of a liberal-modern sensibility was an important part of class reproduction for the second generation in particular. By engaging with notions of being ‘liberal’ and ‘modern’ it allowed for a deeper level of [class] solidarity (see Burbules 1992) with the *white* British middle class which was often understood by the second generation as being a ‘part of’ a more privileged identity (Reay et al. 2007), thus reaffirming and securing a firmer footing within the middle classes. Associations with “being liberal” and “being modern”(either explicitly or implicitly) for the second generation helped distinguish themselves from being seen as consumers of negative stereotypical ‘South Asian practices’, which they felt would undermine their middle class standing. As it transpired, the spaces that many professional second generation inhabited had the *potential* to question their middle class authenticity. Questions about their private life, their “Asian” social practices questioned their sense of belonging comfortably within the middle classes

The extent to which the second generation asserted a narrative of middle class respectability was highly variable and not all individuals were engaged in this ‘concerted cultivation’ (Archer 2010), as ethnicity alone did not necessarily explain the strategies employed by the second generation in their lifestyles, workplace and social practices. The purpose of this chapter was to capture the diversity of middle class second generation identities, the consequences of these differences and the dilemmas that arise. Of particular significance was the way that second generation lives were

presented to various audiences and contexts, whether it was ‘mainstream’ white British people, other ethnic minorities or to other Bengalis.

For many of the second generation their daily lives in London were sometimes tedious, “ordinary” and uneventful. The second generation travelled on the tube to work, wearing the uniform of ‘the professional’, hiding behind novels and newspapers. They might, grab a coffee at *Costas* or sandwich from *Pret a Manger* for lunch. They often worked long hours, travelling back home on the tube or staying a little longer within the city to have a drink or meal with work colleagues or friends. They then returned home, whether that was to their partners, parents or home alone. British Indian Bengalis felt a part of London, involved in the mundane everyday life. Their actions in many ways could be perceived as indistinguishable from any other professional in the city. However, amidst this routine emerged diverse strategies on the ‘presentation of self’ (Goffman (1959) to one’s own and other ethnic groups. For some informants being Indian Bengali was expressed as “important” and “significant”, whilst to others they would describe their identity in terms of “cultural tastes”, “worldview”, “politics” and “lifestyle”. This was further complicated by the impact that space had on how an individual presented themselves. They may wish to present their ethnicity in a diluted form which is placed within the context of other attributes such as being a doctor, middle class, well read, a Londoner, British and Indian Bengali. The ability to downplay the significance of ethnicity in daily interactions provides a tempting avenue of analysis, as provided by Lareau (2003) on minority ethnic middle class strategies. Lareau’s examination of educational strategies employed by minority ethnic middle classes made a case for similar educational strategies being deployed as their white middle class counterparts, further stated that issues of ‘race’ therefore were overplayed⁵⁶. However, Archer (2010) counters Lareau’s broader arguments of over-exaggeration of ‘race’ in her research, arguing that ‘race’ plays a ‘significant and complicating role due to racisms’ (2010: 465).

. . . their racialised positionings qualify and curtail key aspects of class advantage. Consequently, minority ethnic families must work disproportionately ‘harder’ to achieve success.

⁵⁶ Although Lareau accepts that the issue of ‘race’ will become more salient as children grow.

It is important to acknowledge that the second generation were aware of their 'marked' identity, particularly in regards to social representation of negative 'South Asian' stereotypes within the media and common understanding amongst ethnic others. However, British Indian Bengali second generation professionals also had potentially privileging identity attributes associated with their middle class and professional status. This these professional second generation embodied 'competing positions of stigma and privilege' Brekhus (2003: 5), managing their potentially stigmatising South Asian identity with their privileging middle class professional identity. The workplace perhaps best represented a space where British Indian Bengali professional second generation were dealing with these 'competing positions of stigma and privilege'.

Organising identity in the workplace

Amongst the second generation that I met over the course of fieldwork around fifty per cent of them were doctors, dentists, engineers, lawyers or accountants. The other fifty per cent were much more diverse, the largest group of these being IT professionals who made up about 15 per cent. There were three non-professionals, one was car mechanic and two worked in a shop (the last two had learning disabilities). See *Table 1* on the following page.

Table 1: Second generation occupations

Second generation profession or line of work	Number	Percentage⁵⁷
Doctors	11	14 %
Dentists	10	13 %
Engineers	3	4 %
Lawyers	5	6 %
Accountants, actuaries and auditors	12	15 %
IT Professionals	12	15 %
Merchant Bankers	3	4 %
Journalists	2	2 %
Teachers	2	2 %
Scientists	2	2 %
Psychologists	1	1 %
Management consultants	3	4 %
Public sector employees	5	6 %
Actor, musician or playwright,	3	4 %
Advertising and marketing professional	2	2 %
Interior designer	1	1 %
Linguist	1	1 %
Car mechanic	1	1 %
Shop assistant	2	2 %

Second generation British Indian Bengalis were aware of how the different social fields they occupied had corresponding appropriate notions of behaviour. Whilst generationally appropriate behaviour (i.e. with parents and other first generation British Indian Bengali) had shown growing levels of openness (as discussed in the following chapters), within the workplace (especially amongst predominantly British White workplaces) however, it was felt that there were higher levels of social and structural constraints on second generation British Indian Bengalis. Research on Black and minority ethnic (BME) professionals have consistently confirmed and argued that BMEs faced additional barriers in developing their careers even, when they had gained entrance into professional employment with unfair recruitment and selection processes,

⁵⁷ Percentages were rounded off to the nearest whole number

struggling for corporate acceptance and progression and facing both covert and overt discrimination (Bush et al. 2006; Fearfull and Kamenou 2006; Van Dijk 1991) BME women faced with increased levels of marginalisation within the workplace with the double of effects of sexism and racism (Davidson 1997). All of this was compounded by negative influences from political and media reporting (as discussed in the earlier chapters) which impacted the way that ‘South Asians’ were viewed. .

‘Situational’ or ‘shifting’ identities were not unique to the ‘second generation’ (Maira 2002), although the “content” of strategies could vary according to ethnic group or social class. At work, the second generation in many cases worked in a predominantly White British environment and this provided opportunities to examine how the second generation related to ‘mainstream’ society outside of British South Asian/ British Indian Bengali specific sites. However, this switching of codes or managing of identity was reliant also on the responses of other social actors that they came across. The management of different social identities at work was influenced by work colleagues’ attitudes or perceived attitudes towards South Asian social practices. The degree of difference was often determined by the degree of ‘partitioning of cultural fields’ (see Maira 2002) for the second generation. As discussed earlier, negative stereotypes involving South Asians⁵⁸ were well acknowledged and disassociated with by the second generation. However, this resulted in a complex management of social worlds within the workplace. In the workplace the second generation positioned themselves as “modern”, “educated” and “respectable” British *Indian Hindus*; whilst also potentially confirming or suggesting, through their own prejudices and/or fear of association, that *other South Asian* groups such as the British Bangladeshi *Muslims* were more likely to be associated with stereotypical social practices such as: “arranged marriages” and “forced marriages” as with suffering from poverty and not speaking English. Whilst not all British Indian Bengalis adopted this strategy of “blame” towards British Bangladeshi Muslims, there was a significant amount of manoeuvring of identification away from well established stereotypes of South Asians in the workplace.

Mishti was a woman in her mid-twenties who had lived in Runnymede, Surrey, for two years with her husband, Hem, a second generation British Gujarati professional. She

⁵⁸ However, it must be noted that there was also capital to be gained by selectively revealing valued South Asian cultural capital to colleagues such as being able to cook a curry for instance.

had studied at a “good” comprehensive, after which she graduated from the University of Kent with a degree in Economics and Sociology. She had been brought up in Redbridge, where her parents still lived. Mishti worked as a Housing Strategy Officer in a County Council. Mishti drove to work everyday, where she worked in an all British white department, except for one other colleague, a Pakistani woman.

At work I don’t sit there thinking: “Oh I’m Asian” or something like that. I just get on with it. I don’t like the thought of being seen as exotic, not that I’m saying that’s what you’re doing. It’s not that I’m not proud of being Asian, because I am. I have a Pakistani colleague and she is like me, you know kind of relaxed about being Asian. We sometimes might talk about being Asian but we have more of a professional relationship at work, although we do meet outside of that. I guess it is only when people say something stupid, that it reminds us very acutely that we look different [*from her white colleagues*]. I want to be seen as a professional woman, who happens to be Asian, not an Asian who happens to be a professional.

If someone [*a colleague*] asks me a question about being Asian or makes some passing comment then I just address the issue. I don’t think I wear being Asian on my sleeve, neither do I hide it. Do I eat Indian food everyday? No, I eat it sometimes, when I feel like it and when I can be bothered to make it. Did I have an arranged marriage? No, actually Hem and I are from different parts of India, and we met at uni. If they are white and their partner is white should I assume they met in a night club? Honestly, not that I say that. I don’t think they [*White colleagues at work*] mean to be rude, but I know they are trying to find out what kind of Asian I am. Am I the sort that goes home and cooks curry and obeys my husband kind of Asian or not. I guess come to think of it can be a minefield because growing up as an Asian in Britain there is a correct etiquette. If you’re Asian smelling of curry that is a no no. That conjures up all kinds of negative images, a professional smelling of anything like that is not good . . . I think even other Asians probably think that as well. I remember my mum telling us to put our coats in the closet under the stairs so our clothes didn’t smell of curry. My parents eat Bangali food every day but they try not to smell of it, Ma goes around the house with a *jos*⁵⁹ stick [incense] if she is cooking fish, but that isn’t about English people coming into our house, but it smelling nice. I mean that is such a horrible thing that we [*South Asians*] all had to put up with, I haven’t forgotten that. No having oily hair, I remember them [*‘white’ children*] calling us “Pakis”, “smelly”, having “oily hair” . . . I grew up in the seventies and eighties and I remember how it felt and the ways that we tried to stop others from

⁵⁹ Incense stick.

name calling . . . I guess it's different things now, but the same thing applies, avoiding being seen as a "typical Asian" [*she lifts her fingers to form air quotes*], you know, someone who does everything their parents tell them to, live in fear of them [parents], marrying only "our own kind" [*she lifts her fingers to do air quotes*], marrying our cousins, being forced into it actually.

I guess I keep it neutral at work, I don't talk about my ethnic background unless I'm asked, or if an issue arises good or bad. I can't hide my face, I am brown after all, but is that all I am? I would like to think that I am other things. I might just talk about what I saw at the cinema last night or if I saw a good play, a news item on the radio, what I did over the weekend, sometimes it can be quite random . . . going to puja? Yes, I do tell people if I go to puja, but I guess that is more to my friends who are colleagues, otherwise I have to go through a long explanation of: "Yes it is a Hindu festival" and "No it is not Diwali, and it is from West Bengal" blah blah blah.

The emphasising of a professional identity in a predominantly British white working environment was a common strategy employed by many of the second generation and one that Mishti herself uses here. Mishti expresses her comfort at "being Asian". However, her experiences at work and through childhood suggests that there was careful manoeuvring to project the 'right kind' of South Asian. As a South Asian woman, Mishti felt that she was under more scrutiny from her British White colleagues, especially in relation to how she *met* Hem, her husband, where she felt that there were undertones about trying to assess what kind of South Asian woman she was.

Second generation women expressed more incidents of being questioned about their family *situation*, their levels of "freedom" and if they were married, whether it was arranged, than second generation men. One colleague of Monmon's passed a comment about her "*not* being the type" to have an arranged marriage, but her sister being much more so. I asked her what that meant. She felt that her colleague thought that she was much more assertive and challenged stereotypical depictions of British South Asian. Other second generation British Indian Bengali women expressed similar feelings about being under more observation and scrutiny than their male counterparts in regards to their independence from their families. Through these discussions, Mishti said that she did "not hide" her ethnic background but neither does she initiate discussions about "being Asian" unless it came up in conversation, even then she only brought it up with

particular work colleagues. Mishti was keen to emphasise that she was keeping her ethnicity as “neutral”, attempting to emphasise her “professional” credentials.

At work Mishti was keen to emphasise her more professional characteristics, but also her “neutral” sub-cultural tastes in music, film and other interests. If she did mention *puja* she only did so with specific colleagues, because of “long explanation[s]”, but she was comfortable giving details to describe her sub-cultural tastes. While Mishti felt uncomfortable about talking to her colleagues (who were not her friends) about *puja*, she was comfortable conversing about her *non-South Asian* sub-cultural tastes. This partitioning of specific South Asian or Indian practices suggests that Mishti was trying to maintain and control her image at work as “respectable”, “modern”, professional woman who “happened to be Asian”. Her reluctance to share her social practices around *puja* with colleagues more broadly stemmed from her beliefs of feeling essentialised as “brown” by some White colleagues and feeling this somehow impinged on her being seen as “professional”.

The fear of invoking a negative image in her workplace by not following the “right etiquette” was a noticeable theme for Kunal, a second generation British Indian Bengali single, privately educated man in his late twenties. He was a graduate of Business Management with Computer Science from the University of Birmingham. He was working as an applications developer in a well-known investment bank in the City of London. He lived a commutable tube journey away from London. He owned a two bedroom flat in a smart private housing development situated in a fashionable part of Fulham. He had previously lived in Oxford with his parents, and as a consequence did not know as many Bengalis in London as his London-born counterparts. The downplaying of his ethnic identity, Kunal admitted, was particularly apparent within his workplace, where there was a conscious strategy of foregrounding his professional and middle class background, whilst carefully managing his ethnicity.

. . . At work I am still me, I am a professional like any other, I just get on with it. I work well with others, I get on with most people I would say, I can talk on most topics and I like a good old debate . . . No, I don’t really say too much about my friends outside, but they don’t do that much either. Everyone has to appear professional. I mean I don’t hide being Asian, I’m proud of being Asian, but you don’t shove it in people’s

faces, like they wouldn't shove their Englishness in yours, or least not very often.

Being at work in a corporate environment there is a sense of conforming, not just Asians, but everyone conforms in many ways. There was this guy, he was a Muslim, right, and everyone knew about it, I mean, this was before 9/11, he was militant in his attitude. You can't act like that here, you can't act all downtrodden by the system, you piss people off doing that. I had to make it clear in subtle ways that he had nothing to do with me. Some people were sensitive with me, because they saw that I was brown and made the same assumption until I put it right. Making sure they knew I had nothing to do with him, that I was a peace-loving Hindu. Well it's a huge organisation, those who knew me, knew I was alright, but anyway, he didn't last long, you can't like that.

Kunal was adept at the presenting of his identity, particularly at work, he was conscious of appearing "unprofessional" in bearing an "attitude" which may jeopardise his image as a "peace-loving Hindu". Whilst he said that he did not "shove" his "Asianness" in their [his British White colleague's] faces, he was also careful to make it clear that he was *not* Muslim. Kunal in his explanation describes how some people at his work were "sensitive" to his particular phenotype. He feels compelled to deflect this stigma and the implied racist undertones of being "militant" and "too Asian" by contextualising, specifying and ultimately distinguishing *his* Asianness from the murky homogenous into being "Indian", "Hindu", "peace-loving" and attempting to make his ethnicity appear inoffensive. However, in so doing he also blames the "Muslim" gentleman at his workplace for his shortcomings rather than question the institution's prejudices.

Instead in the workplace Kunal organised the presentation of self through expressions of "conforming" to a "professional". Kunal makes the point that he was not alone and that "everyone conforms" to a "professional" image, his colleagues likewise (regardless of ethnicity, marked or not) may also play up to images of the "professional" in different ways. However, the impact of his ethnicity requires *only him* amongst all his colleagues to feel he has to assert his identity in terms of a "peace-loving Hindu" away from the pathologised South Asian Muslim "militant". Kunal's expresses resentment about his Muslim colleague's display of his politics in the workplace, as he feels that it reinforces stereotypes and prejudice. Whilst Kunal recognises the prejudice within the workplace, he does not attempt to challenge it; instead he colludes by acknowledging the

stereotypical images of Muslims whilst employing distancing strategies. Pyke and Dang recognise that the use of derogatory stereotypes by ethnic minorities themselves were an ‘adaptive response to the racial oppression of the larger society’ (2003: 3). These nuanced expressions of prejudice towards British Bangladeshi Muslims in particular were a process similarly employed by Bobby.

Bobby was a second generation man in his late twenties who viewed himself as “able to straddle both British and Indian culture”. He had studied at a comprehensive school in Redbridge, and then went to study Accountancy and Finance at Queen Mary’s, London University. He worked his way through various in-house positions as an accountant and had in the last year started to work for a major Professional Services Company in London. When I first met Bobby, he explained how he wanted to meet and marry a Bengali woman; he was keen to look for such a partner, whether he was to meet that woman on his own or with direct parental involvement. He felt comfortable telling me about his search for a Bengali bride to marry. However, he translated the presentation of his “search for a bride” to “finding someone special” when speaking to many of his non-South Asian colleagues. He was generally more forthcoming about finding a bride to other South Asians, whom he felt “would understand his situation”. Bobby’s varying descriptions of his search for a marriage partner shows how his identity was managed and organised contextually and situationally.

This management of his identity was also expressed in other aspects of Bobby’s life. In all the time I had known Bobby he would on occasion express anti-Muslim sentiments, particularly towards Bangladeshis in front of other second generation British Indian Bengalis. He often used humour to express his view, which was met with a variety of responses ranging from laughter to quiet acknowledgement, to groans and rolling of eyes to direct opposition. However, on one occasion I witnessed a distinct difference in how he had presented his feelings about Bangladeshi Muslims. I had come to visit Bobby and by this time his wife, Soma, and their newborn daughter, Ria. When I arrived at their home I was introduced to a woman in her late twenties, an English colleague of Bobby’s, Sarah, who, like me, came bearing gifts for the new arrival. Easy conversation flowed between all of us. Eventually conversation touched on how a Bengali man had married a Muslim woman and how their families had dealt with the situation. Sarah with a knowing look added that, “Yes, Bobby told me about the history

with Muslims and Hindus in Bengal, it is understandable because of the history between you. Muslims also have different ideals and have traditional values that are very different to the Hindu families”. I watched as Bobby nodded solemnly, he did not add his usual parodying aside. Unable to help myself, I said, “Bengalis *can* be quite prejudiced against Black people as well Muslims”. “Really, I didn’t know that” she said, eyebrows raised. Bobby was silent on the matter and quickly changed the subject. At a later date I asked him about how he spoke about being Bengali at work.

Well I talk a lot at work. I have told people where my family is from, I have to explain that we are Bengalis from India, because everyone thinks Bengalis are from Bangladesh. I tell them about Partition and what it meant for my family, how they had to leave their land behind, all that fighting, all that went on. I also have to tell them *Bangalis* from India and Bangladesh are not the same, we’re not. We have in the main different religions, we have different values, we are different on so many counts. I don’t want Bengalis being lumped as one group, because we’re not. [*I ask: “What group is that?”*] Well one Asian group. People need to be educated about India, Bangladesh and Pakistan and what that means. I think the difficulty we have as Bengalis is that we share the same name as the Bangladeshis, I just don’t want people to make that mistake. Most Bengali Indians feel the same because Indian identity has a different profile than Bangladeshi Sylhetis. I am proud of being Indian and I am proud of being British but I think you have to shape what that means in your life.

Sylhetis are known for being in the restaurant trade, living in Tower Hamlets, living in council housing, living in social deprivation. I don’t know any Indian *Bangalis* that are living there. They [*British Bangladeshis*] are such a dominant group in the public eye, but they *do not* represent all Bengalis, it is important that people know that, even loads other non-Bengali Asians don’t know the difference.

Bobby was aware that his overt stereotyping of others based on religion, colour and ethnicity, whilst being tolerated/accepted/argued against amongst Bengalis, would be deemed as inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. As a result he had modified the way he presented “difference” and his prejudice between British Indian Bengalis and of British Bangladeshi Sylheti Muslims and resisted employing his usual approach. He spoke about British Bangladeshis in a more measured way, providing “facts”, “history” and an “analysis” of British Bangladeshi culture to justify why British Bangladeshi Muslims were more prone to religious fundamentalism, poverty and in essence

inferiority to British Indian Bengalis. All the while Bobby still pushed British Bangladeshi Muslims into a stereotypical pathology (Lawler 2002; 2005; see also Alexander 2000) presenting himself as the “measured voice of reason” whilst emphasising his own distance from British Bangladeshis.

All three of the second generation above worked in predominantly British, white, professional environments, where their physical essentialised difference as “brown skinned” individuals was felt strongly. Regardless of whether they frequented British Indian Bengali spaces or non-British South Asian spaces, whether they partook of particular Indian-South Asian social practices or not, they felt compelled to promote an alternative emphasis of their selves. They all attempted to either highlight socially unmarked identity attributes or to make remarks of distinction about their own ethnic identity attributes in opposition to negative stereotypes of South Asians. These three second generation were inevitably drawn into making tactical choices in how to present themselves, whether they volunteered information or responded to questions concerning their marriages, religion, relationships with their parents and any other *South Asian* social practices that came to mind from White colleagues in particular but also other ethnic groups.

Both Bobby and Kunal, in attempting to protect and distinguish their own sense of middle class respectability, reinforced stereotypes about *other* South Asians. Although Mishti did not explicitly mention British Bangladeshis or “traditional” “South Asians” to her British white colleagues, she described herself as “neutral”, suggesting that she was able to circumvent her ethnicity or at least the negative connotations associated with being “South Asian”. However, Mishti’s standpoint and strategy of under-communicating her ethnicity was contingent on her being able to over-communicate her class status and her status as a “professional”. Mishti links her professional status with her sense of “being professional” and her class status with her sense of being “middle class” as a way to underplay her ethnicity. Mishti’s anxieties of following the “correct etiquette”, pressures to be “modern”, ethnically “neutral” and avoid “negative stereotypes” associated with being *Asian* in the workplace were managed by switching cultural codes. The figure of the “backward Indian” from a “patriarchal family”, “subservient”, “smelly”, “uncouth”, “uneducated”, “fanatical” was a useful stereotype by which the second generation attempted to frame, define and measure themselves

against. Mishti attempted to allay her fears of being “unprofessional” and a product of a negative South Asian stereotype by conveying middle class cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) in the workplace.

The pressure of performing, being “professional”, in the workplace appeared not just a result of conscious partitioning and presenting, but as a result of ‘political structures of race and class’ (Maira 2002: 96). Hesitancy in talking about Indian social and cultural practices, distinguishing oneself from recognisable stereotypes and/or selective shielding and displaying of specifically selected cultural capital came from an awareness of their phenotypical difference from a predominantly White environment. The unease of being singled out or mistakenly misrepresented by homogenising comments made the second generation reluctant to open up their “Indian lives” to their “non-Indian” or “non-Asian” colleagues.⁶⁰

However, there were notable instances of where South Asian, Indian or Indian Bengali cultural capital was felt to be valued in the workplace amongst particular white British friends and colleagues. The particular dynamics were dependent on several factors: the individual themselves; their particular friends at work; the circles they moved in; the workplace culture and/or work colleagues. There were opportunities to express these particular kinds of sub-cultural capital in the form of Indian food, “culture”, clothes, music and jewellery for instance, but they were used advisedly and only when it was felt it was appropriate by the second generation themselves.

Ria, a second generation fundraising officer who worked within an ethnic minority charity in Camden, would sometimes wear a beautiful lightly sequined top she got from Kolkata. She told me that she would not have worn this to her previous workplace, which was more a formal and commercial environment. Ria generally wore “regular clothes . . . skirts, trousers, jumpers, blouses, tops, cardigans” When I asked her where her top fit into her wardrobe she described it as “one cross-over thing, but I wouldn’t wear that to a puja or something like that, it is casual-ish, I’d wear to a Bengali auntie’s house if I was called for lunch or something. I wouldn’t wear a *salawar* to work, although I could if I wanted to wear it, where I am now. It’s a very open place, it has

⁶⁰ However White colleagues who were also friends could potentially be exceptions, although this was dependant on both the second generation themselves and their White colleagues.

ethnic minority workers who wear their traditional clothes, the Bangladeshi community worker wears a *salawar* pretty much every day so, she looks really nice, no problem there, but she's from Bangladesh she's used to wearing it, she is comfortable wearing it, I'm not really". Ria adapts her expressions of Indian clothing to suit her particular workplace, as she deems appropriate for herself. Whilst her sequined top from Kolkata was deemed appropriate for work, her *saris* or *salawar kameezes* were not. I pressed her further as to why she didn't wear a *salawar*, "well my mum doesn't wear a *salawar*, my mum wears saris or trousers, I think a sari would be crazy to wear, I'd trip over on the tube, young women don't even wear them in Kolkata. I only wear saris at Indian weddings or puja that is it".⁶¹

Although supposedly the most socially distant from the mainstream, the stereotypical image of the South Asian sporting South Asian clothes, was the most culturally visible and analytically familiar to the mainstream. An archetypal image that second generation British Indian Bengalis were aware of. South Asian clothes were only worn at specific events such as weddings and *pujas*. The second generation particularly women either bought or were given South Asian clothes by their families from trips to India or from one of the increasing number of South Asian shops in Britain. Second generation men were increasingly sporting *kurta pyjamas*⁶² at *pujas* and sometimes at weddings although men usually preferred wearing suits at such events. Styles and the cost of South Asian clothing depended on individuals and families buying the clothes. There were, however, some times when the second generation would have made or buy shirts or tops, for instance, that they may wear at a social function alongside "Western" clothes such as trousers, jeans or skirts.

In the main the second generation wore jeans, dresses, skirts and trousers, what would be described as "Western clothes". The second generation bought anything from high street fashion to more elite designer wear from the British boutiques. Others chose

⁶¹ Dress was usually as issue more poignant for women as they were almost always expected to wear saris to *pujas* and Indian weddings, although *salawars* were tolerated and *lenga churis* (a tunic and long skirt, often sequined) increasingly accepted. Second generation men's choice of clothing was much less an indicator of their ethnicity or a reflection of their commitment to Bengali culture compared to women (See: Woollet et al. 1994). Although there has been an increase of second generation men (more than their first generation fathers') of the wearing of South Asian clothes including Indian couture is consistent with increased access to such goods and the general wearing of couture by some second generation in Britain.

⁶² *Kurta pyjamas* consisted of a tunic and baggy trousers, they sometimes included a waist coat. The *Kurta pyjama* were worn all over South Asia. Styles varied from plain material to intricate beading.

alternative attire based on cultural styles such as would be worn by “Goths” or within an “Indie” style which required more “alternative” sourcing of clothes including specialist or charity shops. The second generation’s choice of clothes were not limited to objectified dualities of culture which divided culture into Indian/South Asian clothes versus Western/British clothes but shifted to fluid multiple cultural influences. However, with the exception of work aside which holds restrictions on attire on all or most of its employees, British Indian Bengali second generation were literally self-fashioning themselves within multilayered identifications in their day-to-day lives that were not necessarily attached to their ethnicity. Alba (1990) stated that ethnic groups defined their uniqueness in regard to other groups through their culture and certainly my first generation of British Indian Bengalis have shown a higher propensity to do so through their clothes, food, language and customs for example. However, for the second generation I spoke to, their cultural distinction was not commonly sought through their ethnicity, whilst some accented their attire with “Indianess” or “South Asianess”. Whilst *lengas*⁶³, *saris*⁶⁴, *salawars*⁶⁵ and *kurta pyjamas* were worn at South Asian weddings and *pujas*, outside of these spaces cultural distinction through clothes was weighted towards maintaining or asserting middle class belonging. Even when wearing “Indian” or “South Asian” clothes in they were done so to denote their class affiliations.

The third generation of British Indian Bengalis and the next generation of mixed heritage children, who had one parent who was British Indian Bengali, dressed their children differently to how they were dressed as children. Certainly at weddings and *puja* they were dressed in beautiful, expensive outfits usually bought from India. As children, the second generation usually wore “Western” dresses and it was not until they

⁶³ A *lenga* is a traditional dress worn mainly in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala by young girls between puberty and marriage. However, it has gained popularity amongst second generation British South Asians due to media attention in India and popularity by other South Asian groups in Britain. Many second generation British Indian Bengali women have worn them to weddings, including their own (although not often as the attire worn at the wedding ceremony where a sari was considered “more Bengali”).

⁶⁴ A *sari* is a strip of unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine metres in length. It is draped over the body in various regional and national styles. Saris are worn all over South Asian, particularly Indian, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

⁶⁵ A *salawar kameez* comprises of a tunic that can come down to mid-thigh or over the knee, it is worn over baggy or fitted trousers accompanied with duppata which is draped in a shawl like manner over one or both shoulders or over the head. Second generation out of the saris, lengas and salawars are least likely to wear this particular choice of clothing in Britain as they feel it is more closely associated with Pakistanis and Punjabi groups.

reached their teens that women in particular started wearing saris to South Asian weddings and *pujas*. The third generation were more likely to be dressed in South Asian clothes outside of these specific events, perhaps to a birthday party or to friend's houses for dinner. The second generation also bought clothes from places such as Monsoon for their children which had been influenced by South Asian clothing with "Western" labels. However, in general most children in their everyday lives were dressed mainly from high street shops depending on budget. As dressing of their children in South Asian clothing in non-South Asian spaces was carefully managed and controlled by their parents, how this develops as children enter teenage years will provide an area of great interest. The second generation's limited displaying of ethnicity through their children's clothes suggests a level of middle class confidence within the realms of their social lives. It is important to note that second generation British Indian Bengalis in their wearing and dressing of their children in "South Asian" clothes do so briefly and intermittently. Borrowing from Gans' symbolic ethnicity where 'symbols are borrowed from it [culture]' (1979: 12) helps understand how second generation experience "Indian Bengali" or "Asian" culture where there is a disconnect which can be bridged through selectively displaying external markers of their ethnicity beyond phenotypical indicators.

In a similar way Indian food was also presented in a selective manner. Certainly in the workplace there was little to no Indian food eaten at work by the second generation. Lunch at work usually consisted of homemade or bought sandwiches, sushi and salads. If food was bought from eateries, it was all dependent on location. Their first generation parents followed similar patterns at work. Even though curry was voted as Britain's most 'favourite food' in 2006 (*The Daily Telegraph* 2009), it did not encourage second generation professionals to bring curry to work. Indian food was rarely taken from home to work by my respondents especially if they worked in the corporate sector in the City of London for instance, however, there could be more of an option for others like Ria who worked in an "open place".

However, a white British colleague invited to dinner *may* be fed Indian food displaying second generation's prowess around Indian cuisine, equally they may not as second generation's own consumption of food was so varied.. Whilst the consumption of Indian food was extremely popular amongst the second generation, it was not

necessarily eaten everyday and was dependent on several variables: if they were single, if they lived at their parental home, when they arrived home from work, if they had a partner whether their partner was from India; whether they could cook and personal preference of food. Ray's observations of first generation and second generation American Bengalis' patterns of consumption perhaps best capture the matter:

[Of the first generation:] Breakfast and lunch would provide fodder for assimilationist arguments, while dinner would confirm the expectations of those who insist on ethnic survival . . . By the second generation, the pace of assimilation accelerates dramatically for complex reasons of intent, convenience, mixed socialization, and the slow dissipation of an ethnic memory. (Ray 2004)

The second generation often shopped at their local mainstream supermarkets and local speciality shops which could include South Asian foods, they were less likely to travel distances from their homes in the suburbs or trendy areas of London to South Asian centres such as Southall, Wembley or Green Street to buy vegetables, rice, *dahl* and spices. Although, if they were passing they may buy products such as noodles, rice, dahl or spices at cheaper prices than their regular shopping haunts. I knew of very few second generation who went to the trouble to buy and/or prepare *hilsa* (also known as or *ilish* which was an oily, bony sea fish considered a delicacy amongst Bengalis) for instance. However, the very same second generation relished a "Bengali feast", as prepared by their first generation parents, their parents' friends or sometimes their second generation British Indian Bengali friends (although rarely *hilsa*). There was certainly some cultural capital to be gained for second generation in exhibiting "Bengali culture" to a Bengali audience, such as being able to eat *hilsha* (i.e. being able to navigate around the bones of the fish and appreciate its flavour) and certainly to prepare such a fish was very considered impressive. However, outside of these intermittent events, second generation' diets reflected the diversity of their social lives and networks. The immediacy and ease of cooking pasta or a stir fry for instance after a long day at work became a reality for many second generation. Also, the second generation were less able, unlike their first generation parents, to draw on a catalogue of Bengali dishes. Their years of cooking as students, away from home, and eating out much more for instance shifted their cooking abilities alongside their food preferences to a broader and/or alternative range of food. Whilst there were certainly exceptions to

this, in the main second generation British Indian Bengalis cooked and consumed “Bengali” and “South Asian” food to much less of a degree to their parents, ranging from three to four times a week to only at weekends to whenever the mood hits them. Whatever their choices in food consumption it was significant that there was such a varied response, much more so than clothes, for instance, where second generation were much more “careful” in displaying their ethnicity through their clothing. Eating Bengali or South Asian food could be done so in the privacy of their homes, which did not provoke resistance from the mainstream British White society. Thus, interacting and managing of identity through food *could* be contained within the home.

Interacting and managing identity through social lives

Second generation’s social lives and networks were highly varied and complex. The composition of one’s friendships was dependent on many factors such as their interests, their family friends growing up, where they lived presently, the school they attended, their employment and their profession. Most of my second generation respondents were not strongly anchored within the British Indian Bengali community. They lived and worked in dispersed locations within London. They had a range of social networks that extended across a wide range of ethnic, religious and interest groups. These simultaneous affiliations constructed a breadth of networks with a wide range of friends and cultural fields; which generated a variation of expression of identity and membership.

The location where a second generation person grew up often had great bearing on how much access they had to other Bengali families. Very often those who lived in London and the surrounding suburbs, had access to a relatively close network of family friends, those whom they had grown up with as children. Many second generation described how, as children, they would be taken to or even take part in cultural evenings and *pujas*. The weekends would often be filled with dinners or lunch invitations to other Bengali families’ homes. As they grew up, some of the second generation attended Bengali language classes, Indian classical dance, singing and/or musical classes. Monmon is a second generation woman in her early thirties who had grown up in Borough of Enfield, London. This is how she recalled attending Bengali functions or *pujas* in her childhood:

We [*herself and other children*] used to run up and down the stairs and between the rooms, while the parents were doing the puja. Ma never said you have to sit in the puja room and pray to Ma Durga, she felt that I was absorbing the whole thing by just being there. It was a lot of fun then, I just used to hang about with my friends and have a lot of fun, it was great.

Monmon spent a lot of her weekends as a child and young teenager mixing with other Bengali families. Families were drawn together for a variety of reasons; many of her parents' friends were either college friends from India, or friends they had made as a young couple or when her father had first come to London as a student bachelor, others were new friends made through a network of Bengalis either through Bengali functions or *pujas*, as well as meeting at a mutual friends' homes. She remembered how she used to go upstairs to her friends' bedroom:

We would arrive and Ma and Baba would go into the sitting room and I would go upstairs and see Sabir and we would talk, play Monopoly, Cluedo or Carrom, and get out the talcum powder from his mum [*we laugh*] . . . it was so amazing I remember when he got the Sinclair Spectrum 56 was it? Any way that was cool, we would play that. But he always used to beat me at that. I had a few friends' houses that we used to visit quite often, there was also Tapan's, Chitra's and Nandita's. They were the ones we visited the most, although there were others, but those were the ones we used to see at least once a month or every two months.

She spoke fondly of her childhood British Indian Bengali friends, and remained friends with a few of them. Monmon as a child did not see her Bengali friends during the week; she attended a comprehensive school in Enfield, where there were only a small number of South Asians students, and none of them of Indian Bengali origin. This was a common experience for many of the second generation, although those who attended private school may have had more chances to come across another British Indian Bengali. In the main, school and weekend life for the second generation often meant interacting with different ethnic social actors; this would involve foregrounding and matching presentation of self with the surroundings, while playing down other elements that might be discouraged in a particular setting. In school Monmon, as was the case with many other second generation experienced direct and indirect racism which involved: insensitive questions and assumptions about their social practices, racist name

calling and/or bullying from British white school mates. The pressure of being identified as “different” was imposed on British Indian Bengali second generation and this initiated the process of distinguishing themselves from these negative stereotypes.

There was less “tension” however in the presentation of self for the British Indian second generation that Maira describes, in her study of second generation Indians in the United States of America. Maira attributes the way that her second generation Indians present themselves as ‘driven by immigrant parents’ ignorance, presumed or actual, of their children’s adoption of ‘forbidden behaviours or styles’ on the one hand and on the other ‘non-Indian friends, teachers, and their parents [who] do not know or understand the reasons for the different social roles’ (2002: 96). First generation Bengali parents in general placed fewer restrictions on their children’s lives, which allowed for more transparency between different cultural and social fields. This contrasted with cultural fields such as school which required careful manoeuvring to avoid stigma associated with a marked identity of being South Asian as with their lives as professionals (as discussed above).

As university dawned for most of the second generation group, many of them left home. During this time, whether the second generation lived in halls of residence or at home, there was a period of disconnection from the Bengali networks as they were heavily involved with studies and university social life. There was usually a sporadic involvement with the Bengali community for second generation whose peers were similarly at university and pre-occupied with university life. However, individual Bengalis did maintain personal friendships with their Bengali second generation peers. Whilst attending the University of Birmingham to study Information Systems and Business Studies, Monmon, like most of her second generation Bengalis counterparts was largely absent from Bengali functions, making the odd appearance when she came to London. When university ended many second generation returned to London either to their parent’s home, to rented accommodation or bought property, often closer to work. Some second generation began to re-establish Bengali friendships and for the few who joined the Junior Tagore Centre, came the reimagining of networks and “community”, which coincided with their return (see: Chapter 4, *Trying to Become Bengali*). Kunal, who attempted to under-communicate any conscious *negative* South Asian attributes at work, was keen to express his South Asianess, in particular Indian

credentials outside of work in South Asian/Indian spaces. He was keen to express his affiliation with other Indians, particularly Sikh and Hindu Punjabis⁶⁶. (Kunal was very drawn to *bhangra*⁶⁷ music I had seen him on several occasions make practised erudite moves on the dance floor particularly to Bhangra tracks.) Kunal had several parties that I attended where all the guests were British South Asian with the exception for a second generation British Turkish friend, who was considered as “one of us”. At one particular party there were over thirty guests, principally Bengali, but also some other South Asians. Many of his guests were new Bengali friends he had made at the Tagore Centre, friends of friends, but also included a few of his old family friends, all of whom were Bengali.

I feel most at home with Asians, I always have done, my closest friends are Asians, they get how it feels. Its not like I don't have white friends, I do, but my closest friends are Asian. I really felt this when I was at uni, I made such brilliant friends, they really were like my brothers, I had a different level of friendship one that I shared with some of my family friends, who are like my extended family. I felt comfortable, you know I can relax.

Within the Indian Bengali or Indian community, he played up an Indian authenticity, especially through his love of bangra music, but he also adopted a ‘Black style’ (see: Maira 2002; Chapter 4: *Trying to Become Bengali*;) in a bid to acquire sub-cultural capital in specific spaces such as nightclubs or when with other British India second generation⁶⁸, which was sometimes adopted by a few second generation men. However, Kunal could also adeptly foreground his middle class background, assert his significant financial status and his academic learning at work or when speaking to first generation British Indian Bengalis. Kunal was well able to negotiate many locations through a careful and relaxed management of his identity, whether he met up with work colleagues after work, his university friends, friends from previous workplaces, his family friends or his friends from the Tagore Centre. When Kunal met his British

⁶⁶ Indra was particularly drawn to Sikh and Hindu Punjabis, as he had made many close friends from both these second generation groups at university, whom he referred to as his “brothers”.

⁶⁷ *Bhangra* was a style of dance and music from the Punjab region. Although Bhangra was a dance that began in rural Punjab, in Britain it has often been adopted not only by second generation British Punjabis but by British South Asians.

⁶⁸ Whilst the first generation of British Indian Bengalis expressed their prejudices against British African and British Caribbean communities, the second generation were less prejudiced in this regard. While having friends who were British Black was not considered “an issue”, marrying someone from this community was considered a difficult proposition to pose for the second generation proposing such a marriage union. ‘Black style’ however, was considered another matter entirely. The politics of ‘cool’ were significant particularly amongst younger second generation (see Chapter 4 for further discussion).

Indian friends socially, as with many other second generation British Indian Bengalis, he went to non-South Asian specific spaces (although during *pūja* and on some Tagore Centre nights out he did enter South Asian specific spaces.). On most occasions an evening out with British Indian or and/or British Indian Bengali friends were within social zones that could have been frequented by any British White middle class London professional.

Unlike Kunal, the majority of the second generation felt more disconnected with the “Bengali community”, although not necessarily individual British Indian Bengalis. Since returning back home to London from her postgraduate courses, Monmon had attended less Bengali functions. Now in her late twenties, Monmon worked in London, in-house, providing IT Support for the NHS. She had recently moved into her first flat in Ealing, West London, which made travelling into Central London for work and social life very convenient. She had also wanted to stay relatively close to her parents who still lived in Palmer’s Green. Although Monmon had some male friends, her close circle included mostly young women from various ethnic groups and predominantly middle class. Her friends drawn mainly from school, university, various workplaces and Bengali family friends

I have different friends, I do have more Asian friends, than English, but I don’t feel restricted, you know. I want to feel that my friends are not restricted in which race they come from. I have more Asian friends, that’s not a deliberate choice, I think that would be sad, it shouldn’t be like, when I was in school it wasn’t like that. I don’t have that many European friends, but that’s not to mean that I’m going to look for some because I haven’t got any, it just happened that way. I think as you get older, you perhaps come together with people you have a connection with not just about your ethnic roots but hobbies and interests.

I don’t really feel that one thing defines me. Others might, but I don’t. I’m so many things, it’s horrible to think that I can only be seen in one way - in a Asian way. I don’t go around making a point about my being Asian or Hindu, to me it’s not such a big issue in my life, to some it might be. Some Asians go on and on about being Asian, I mean, yes it is important, but is that the sum of you? I live my life, meeting so many people, so many ethnicities, I don’t just keep to one ethnic group, that’s so boring when you live in London, you can experience so many different cultures, what a waste not to experience them . . .

Monmon's friendships spanned many ethnic groups. As is common in much British everyday discourse, she conflates ethnicity with race (Arber 2008) in this extract. However, she is keen to draw back from the essentialism that both race and ethnicity imply, emphasising sharing interests rather than racial or ethnic classification.

(including second generation British Indian Bengalis) and she enjoyed shared pastimes with them, whether this was going to the pub, eating out, intermittent R n' B, mainstream clubbing, going to the cinema and gym and inviting and being invited to friends' for dinner. She went on holidays with her friends visited friends who had moved abroad. She went out with work colleagues, usually restricting this to meals and drinks unless work colleagues became good friends, then they may meet her close friends at parties for example where there was an intermingling of her social groups. For the most part she met her friends individually or in twos, less often in large mixed groups, her birthday or a party she held in her home would be exceptions. On one occasion, she held a party inviting 25 friends at her flat for "as an excuse to catch up with mates I haven't seen for a while" she had different groups of friends, of different ethnicities, of different cultural fields. The group consisted of roughly half second generation British Indian Bengalis; one quarter Indian second generation (including two Malayalees, two of Gujaratis and one Punjabi Sikh woman,) and the other quarter consisted of British White friends, the majority of whom were English. Monmon was less keen on Bengali specific occasions such as Bengali functions and *pujas*:

I deliberately don't go to these events [*pujas, cultural evenings, etc.*] not only because they ask you questions about when you're getting married and what are you doing in your career kind of questions, but because I'm actually not that interested, I don't feel I need to go. If I want to see my Bengali friends, I'll go and see them, I don't need to go to puja to see my friends.

Monmon expressed boredom at such events and the increasing number of inappropriate comments and questions addressed to her when attending British Indian Bengali functions. She found comments particularly from the first generation about her unmarried status difficult to address politely. She also felt that second generation were trying to over-communicate their Bengaliness to her trying to do what Maira calls 'authenticate' (2002) their ethnic identity. Monmon felt doubtful about some of the motives and interpretations of what it meant to be a second generation growing up in

Britain. She felt that within the British Indian Bengali circle there was too much pressure to conform to a prescriptive script concerning expectations of her being married and having a high flying career and demonstrating her authentic Bengali cultural self. That some of the second generation were: “going on and on about being Bengali and making people feel that they are not Bengali enough because they don’t have some specific bits of knowledge”. Monmon felt that activities advocated by the Tagore Centre, such as singing songs from Tagore or taking part in plays written by Tagore, were not the only way to be valued within Bengali culture. She felt alienated by a few of the core members of the Junior Tagore Centre whom she had known previously and were keen to reaffirm their Bengaliness. As a result Monmon often enjoyed perpetuating opinions amongst these few second generation Junior Tagore Centre members of her “inauthentic” leanings.

I don’t feel I have to defend myself by saying what books I have or have not read, I have read all of Tagore’s plays and I like reading new Indian writers from America and here . . . If an issue comes up in conversation I will address it, but I’m not sure that not knowing one piece of information makes you ignorant. I really can’t be bothered with their rantings about how amazing they are.

Monmon, however, also expressed feelings of insecurity when a couple of second generation members took issue with her “lack of knowledge” about “her own culture” in conversations that they had. Monmon avoided particular members of the Tagore Centre and the circles that they mixed in, even when a Bengali friend of hers who had joined the Tagore Centre and tried to convince her on many occasions to join, she refused. She did however attend a couple of the Tagore Centre socials which she enjoyed as it had “nothing to with poncing around saying how well versed you are in Tagore, they were actually quite fun” (see Chapter 4: *Trying to Become Bengali*).

I mean it’s good that there are things like the Tagore Centre [*Youth Forum*] to bring us all into the community. It would be nice to keep some kind of connection, but I think under a general sort of thing I think it’s kind of cliquey and . . . of course we want to know about our language and our culture but I think that we should broaden ourselves.

I guess I’m not that Bengali . . . well perhaps being Bengali is not everything to me, it is a part of me . . . I do like to be associated with my Bengali community, but not *all* the time. I also want to experience other peoples’ cultures whatever they are . . . you don’t

just hang around the big Bengali community, through college and through work. You come across people from other communities, and isn't that better? . . . Especially of our generation who think that it is all or nothing and that's not on, but if they're happy that's fine but I wouldn't like that.

. . . of course we want to know about our language and our culture but I think that we should broaden ourselves. I think that some Bengalis have these kinds of things, like a check list or something and then you're fine you know you can be a proper Bengali . . . I don't think that it is right, considering that we weren't brought up in India, we were brought up outside of India, so considering this we should be going the other way.

Monmon felt that her ethnicity was not a narrative that she wished to dominate her identity. She found that in Bengali spaces such as *pujas*, cultural evenings, weddings and large occasions that individuals may pass judgement or comment on her unmarried status⁶⁹. Marriages were perhaps a particularly poignant reminder of her single status, which became increasingly felt as younger member of the Bengali were getting married. Monmon found questions and comments about her non-married status difficult, as sometimes the questioner may have applied little or no tact in their enquiry. This compounded her inclination to stay away from such events. This feeling of "being judged" was also stated by other second generation whether it was with regards to expectations of educational achievement, professional status or married status. Monmon's refusal to be involved with these "Bengali" social occasions did not result in Monmon being shunned by other second generation or first generation, particularly as she was not alone in avoiding such events.

Kajol, in contrast to Monmon, approached Bengali events with relish, viewing these practices as part of an authentic Indianess. Kajol was a London-born, privately educated, second generation in her mid-twenties. She had attended the University of Glasgow where she gained a Degree and a Masters in Chemistry with Medicinal Chemistry. Now she worked for the NHS. Since starting her degree, she had lived away from home, even when she had graduated and returned to London. She settled in a rented flat in Finchley, close to her parents', who she frequently visited, particularly in the weekends. Like Monmon, she had lived in Enfield as a child and although these

⁶⁹ For British Indian Bengali second generation women not being married when over thirty was met with the questioning rather than strong disapproval from the majority of other attendees, but awkward none the less (see: Chapters 5 and 6).

two women had known each other and each other's family's since they were children, they were not friends. This was further exacerbated by their different life choices and life courses taken by the women where Monmon was not married and Kajol was. Kajol had had children, whilst Monmon had not

On occasions where Kajol found herself amongst the "Bengali community" she made great efforts to communicate to first generation Bengalis her Bengali, Hindu and Indian authenticity. Although both Monmon and Kajol spoke to the first generation in fluent Bengali, Kajol would on occasion go to greater lengths to emphasise her cultural proficiency. On one occasion, at the home of a first generation on the eve of their offspring's wedding, I saw her pick up a Bengali language novel off a bookshelf to read the title aloud in front of two first generation women to much accolade. On another occasion I heard her volunteer to sing several Bengali songs from memory to a group of first generation Bengalis who happened to be singing, much to the horror of her accompanying Bengali friends, who fled from the scene when asked to join in from their non-existent Bengali singing repertoire. She expressed her enjoyment of her Bengali identity. At one of the Tagore Centre meetings she said:

I have different friends. My English friends, I studied with them, know them through school, through uni or work, I can talk to them and we get on, but there are things that they don't understand about me. My Indian friends, they know where I am coming from, I can talk to them about most things and it feels really good. But when I am with my Bengali friends, they are the ones I feel most comfortable with, I don't have to try very hard or explain stuff they just understand. I would like to keep in touch with Bengalis, I feel as a community we are not really seeing each other like other Asian communities do.

. . . I love being Bengali, it is so enriching, we have so much culture that you can immerse yourself into. We have such a vast literature to explore, although I don't do a lot of reading in Bangla books. I love going to puja, catching up with old friends, it's great. I miss them during the year, I think that's what's so wonderful about the Tagore Centre, it really give you chance to see other Bengalis, I mean apart from puja that is, but that is usually only Durga Puja and once a year.

Kajol's network of friends like Monmon's spanned school, university, work and her "Bengali friends". However, when Kajol spoke of her "English friends" she said, "there are things that they don't understand about me", suggesting that she under-

communicated her Bengaliness that made her feel so “comfortable” with her Bengali friends. Whilst Kajol was fiercely proud of her Bengali culture she was reluctant to become the ‘proud pariah’ (Weinstein 2000: 93)⁷⁰ where she lived her “Bengali lifestyle” at all times, but only in spaces and times where it is accorded a high social value.

Whilst Kajol expressing her complete “comfort” with Bengali friends, this was not strictly true. Kajol had censored her living arrangement with Ajay (although crucially not her relationship/friendship with him) from her family and good British Indian Bengalis friends. She told me that she hadn’t told anyone about her living with him as she didn’t “want this kind of stuff going around” However, she did tell her work colleagues about her living together with Ajay, but not of the *hiding* her cohabitation to her parents and wider British Indian Bengali community:

Well I’m not going to tell them [British white colleagues] that [*that she was hiding her cohabitation with her boyfriend from her family and Bengali friends*], I mean they don’t really have a problem with me living with someone. It’s just normal, isn’t. If I start tell them I am hiding living with Ajay, they are going to start thinking that I am some poor Indian girl fighting against the patriarchal Indian system. I’m not, I leading my own life and they [her parents] know him and that is enough, they don’t need to know every detail about my relationship and neither does work.

Unlike Monmon, Kajol was keen to separate her cultural fields. When she celebrated her birthday, invited people to dinner or to her marriage rituals⁷¹, she did not allow for different groups of friends or colleagues to meet. The main reason for this anxiety was based around her living arrangements with her boyfriend, although significantly not her boyfriend himself. However, in all fields Kajol *endeavoured* to display immaculate ‘omnicontextual’ (Brekhus 2003) behaviour. So for instance at work she told her colleagues that she was living with her boyfriend but not that her parents and community were unaware of this. As the Bengali community were less concerned with issues of *izzat* (honour) (see: chapter 5 *Modern Bengali Women*) and were accepting of many “Western” influences this enabled Kajol to introduce her boyfriend to her Bengali

⁷⁰ Weinstein developed this term to refer to how sub-cultural youth willingly accept stigma associated with their music, wearing it as a badge of honour.

⁷¹ Although one exception was her wedding at a plush hotel in Central London.

life, although to maintain her reputation⁷² she did not mention her living arrangements with him:

I don't want them to think that I'm from some hick village Asian family, I don't want to tell them about that. At work I'm seen as a woman who knows her own mind, and I do, I don't want to be pitied, because there is nothing to pity, there is no need to give every detail of my life to anyone in particular, my parents, workplace, anyone. Bengalis are not like some of the other Asians, we can choose who we marry, Bengalis have marriages with other [ethnic] groups, but it makes everything easier if you do it in a particular way.

The importance of distancing herself from negative stereotypes of a “hick village Asian family” and patriarchal imaginings of a South Asian family was a familiar anxiety shared by the other Bengalis mentioned earlier in this chapter, particularly in the realms of work. This selective partitioning and merging of cultural fields was both situational and contextual. For Kajol, her selective presentation of her relationship with her boyfriend to all her cultural fields required her to manage information about her cohabitation to her parents; and for example to manage her parent's potential disapproval to her “white friends”. However, her boyfriend was able to access both sets of cultural fields as “a friend” and as “a boyfriend” as a British Indian Gujarati. Other parts of her life - such as moderate consumption of alcohol, going clubbing and going out at night for example, even over the weekends when she visited her parents this allowed for more permeable experiences. She hid her smoking habit, as this would have been frowned upon by her parents.

Disparity of social identities, Maira notes, is determined by ‘immigrant parents’ presumed or actual ignorance of their children's adoption of ‘forbidden behaviors or styles’ (2002: 96). This certainly rang true for second generation British Indian Bengalis, except that there were further nuances in understanding the dynamics of compartmentalisation of their lives. Second generation's lives were less rigidly constructed and regulated by ‘behaviours and styles’ imposed by their first generation parents, which required less of a need to ‘manage’ different social identities. For most second generation having a boyfriend or a girlfriend, for example, if not explicitly understood by parents, the introduction of “a friend” was acceptable as mixed gender

⁷² *Izzat* is too strong a word in this context

friends were not considered as inappropriate or uncommon for either gender. For some second generation actively finding a partner was expected, especially as many of the second generation made it clear to their parents that they were uninterested in parents' involvement in their search for a partner. However, there were limits. Cohabitation was frowned by most first generation, but increasingly tolerated, when a small minority of second generation, especially men openly lived with their partners. Taking part in London nightlife, dancing, drinking and to a lesser extent smoking (although more tolerated for men) were understood to be a part of contemporary practices amongst "young people" in Britain, many first generation themselves took part in dancing, drinking and smoking (typically only men smoked), so such behaviours unless taken to excess, were not viewed in terms of 'prohibition' that Maira (2002) describes. This reduced the need for strict partitioning of cultural fields, instead there was a balancing act of selective partitioning and merging of fields as appropriate to an individual.

Sanjay provides an example of a second generation, professional single man who worked in the finance sector and who regularly got drunk on Friday nights with his friends, either from work or outside of work. Whilst his work colleagues were mostly British English, his friends outside of work tended to be more ethnically diverse, although almost exclusively middle class. He met up with second generation Bengalis (as a group) much less frequently, but would partake in similar activities with them. When he lived at home with his parents for a couple of years he did not feel the need to "sneak around" and his life outside of his parental home did not require him to strongly compartmentalise his life. Sanjay's own parents although not regular drinkers themselves, drank occasionally setting up a more porous layer between the two cultural fields. Sanjay was perhaps more sheepish about the amount of alcohol he consumed rather than drinking itself. Acceptance of drinking alcohol by the second generation was widespread amongst the first generation. This was illustrated when second generation were attending Camden Town Hall *Durga Puja* and would state that they were "popping over" to *The Dolphin* pub across the road.. When entering the pub for the first time, I saw the bar brimming with other second generation British Indian Bengalis of both genders and a few first generation men and couples drinking at the same pub. After the initial surprise of seeing both generations in a pub I recalled the great number of times that both generations drank alcohol in other contexts, such as parties, weddings and at home.

The first generation had seen “British culture” as occupying an important part in their children’s and their own lives, “British culture” was not strongly seen as ‘seductive’ and ‘polluting’ in the way that Maira’s first and even some second generation South Asian Americans viewed American culture (in comparison to the ‘purity’ and ‘innocence’ of ‘South Asian culture’) (2002). Generally the first generation were sympathetic to differences emerging amongst the second generation, although second generation’s lives were not without constraints, contradictions and complexities. Much literature describing inter-generational relationships often described second generation behaviour that was frowned upon by other first generations South Asian groups such as having friends of the opposite gender, dating and drinking alcohol (see: Dhooleka 2003; Maira 2002; Alexander 2000; Prinja 1999; Bhopal 1999; Brah 1979; Ballard 1979). However, increasingly these behaviours were regarded as permissible by British Indian Bengali first generation. What was especially illuminating was the second generation’s relaxation of partitioning other cultural fields from first generation parents. The second generation felt able and enabled (by the first generation) to share a window (if a little rose tinted) into their worlds of study, work and socialising with their parents’ generation.

Conclusion

Maira warns against seeing the negotiation of social roles as unique to second generation ethnic minority, she suggests instead seeing her second generation as individuals who have to ‘manage a range of social roles (Strauss 1995; Strauss and Quinn 1994; Waters 1990). A person may identify as a mother in one situation, an employee in another, a member of an ethnic group in a third, and American when outside U.S. borders, and so on.’ (Maira 2002: 100-101). For South Asians generally and for these second generation specifically their ‘identity management strategies’ (Brekhus 2003) were not simply “between two worlds”, as Baumann (1996) argues, i.e. South Asian ethnicity versus their British nationality but also framed within other dimensions such as class, gender, social resources and identifying boundaries. The management of their identities was more strongly driven in the world of work, especially in the corporate world where anxieties to conform were heightened. For British Indian Bengalis the under-communication of their ethnicity (in particular

negative stereotypical traits associated with being South Asian) or the conscious communication of an Indian middle class respectability was seen as essential in a predominantly British white environment. An insistence on a “professional” or a “neutral” identity in the workplace went some way to suggest unease with some of the strategies employed by the second generation in inter-ethnic and inter-religious prejudices. In a bid to deflect beliefs espoused in the media and recognisable stereotypes of ‘the South Asian’, second generation British Indian Bengalis assigned these stereotypes to other groups, i.e. British Bangladeshi Muslims, British South Asian Muslims, British Pakistanis’ or “traditional” British South Asians. Whilst these identities were constructed as a means to resist ethnically stigmatising statuses, they worked to reproduce offensive, homogenising and deprecating stereotypes of these ‘other’ and specific South Asians. Pyke and Dang (2003), drawing on ‘race’ scholars, acknowledge that ‘racism shapes the attitudes and subjectivities of everyone living within its cage, including the oppressed (Feagin 2000; Omi and Winant 1994)’ (2003: 150). For the British Indian Bengali second generation these racist stereotypes produced discomfort and embarrassment; they then felt compelled to present a self-conscious middle class “modern” positioning which distanced themselves from negative constructions. This distinguishing strategy required the second generation to manoeuvre and adopt cultural symbols in ways specific to their own experiences in non-Bengali spaces.

The general acceptance by first generation parents of their offspring’s social lives contextualised second generation strategies of selective shielding and displaying of their to parents and other first generation elders.⁷³ There were higher expectation on women rather than men to communicate their culture through their clothes at *pujas* and Bengali wedding receptions for example (see chapter 5: “*Modern*” Bengali Women for further discussion on second generation women); however the loosening of nostalgia and ‘forbidden behaviours’ meant that there were less self-conscious behaviours allowing for disparity, discrepancy and ambiguity to develop more openly between and within generations. This allowed for a more translucent partitioning of their lives, not to suggest that it was without contradiction and dilemma as will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

⁷³ These strategies were subject to change over a lifecourse, which are not discussed here.

Disconnection with the “Bengali community” was often expressed by the second generation. This detachment was usually pinpointed at the same time as leaving for university, although for others it came earlier. Whilst some expressed longing for a “Bengali community”, others saw this disconnect as a natural step into adulthood and developing their own friendships. Regardless of how my respondents felt about the “Bengali community”, they all agreed that there was no space specifically for second generation British Indian Bengalis . . . that was until The Junior Tagore Centre appeared. Amongst the proclamations of indifference, feelings of disconnect and for others a desire to bond with other British Indian Bengalis came an organisation that wanted to encourage the second generation of British Indian Bengalis to “get involved”. The following chapter follows the story of a small group of second generation who embark on a journey through The Junior Tagore Centre.

Chapter 4

Trying to Become Bengali

This chapter intends to explore the period from the late 1990s to the early 2000s for several second generation British Indian Bengalis charting their involvement within the Tagore Centre. Through their varying degrees of participation I was able to study their relationships with an “ethnic revival” as spurred on by the Tagore Centre. This also allowed me to focus on markers of ethnic allegiance or authenticity and their significance to the second generation in particular. This was all the more interesting in light of second generation’s proclamations and demonstrable favouring of attained statuses of class, profession and education and increased weakening of ascribed statuses.

However, Bengali second generation were not moving into alternative ethnic categories, as was reported in Alba and Islam (2009), Alba et al. (2000) and Massey and Denton (1992). This literature describes how certain affluent Mexican Americans “passed” themselves off to be “white” on the census. This would not be an option for Bengalis who were physically distinct from the majority population in Britain and also categorised by others as ethnic group members. This identity shift amongst the second generation was more nuanced, where ethnicity was not exchanged for another, instead it was displaced by socioeconomic status as a predominant identity marker for the second generation. This suggested a shift away from previous descriptions of second generation British Indians such as Prinja’s second generation Gujaratis (1999) and Jhutti’s second generation Sikhs (1998), where even though there was a high level of involvement in mainstream society by these second generation, there was also a strong level of ethnic, language, region and caste identification. In comparison second generation Bengalis, have identified strongly with “being modern” and having a middle class identity, which has transformed “traditional” conceptualising of status away from caste, regional language and ethnic group and instead placing a greater emphasis on education, “culture” and professional employment.

However, during the late 1990s and early 2000s I observed an interesting development amongst the second generation which appeared to contradict this de-emphasis in ethnic

identity.⁷⁴ A growing number of second generation respondents became interested (to varying degrees) in the Tagore Centre, which had started a Youth division. The Tagore Centre UK was an organisation that was “dedicated to uphold the legacy of Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest creative artist in recent time” (Tagore Centre UK 2002). Based in London, it had a mainly first generation Bengali membership, although there was membership worldwide spanning many nationalities and ethnicities, the main contingent were first generation Bengali. Their members published Tagore related materials, organised and performed in theatre productions, dance performances and visual arts exhibitions by artists from overseas and Britain. Rabindranath Tagore was considered a pivotal part of Bengali culture (both West Bengal and Bangladesh) but also a part of Indian heritage. Being the most prolific writer in Bengali literature to date, Tagore wrote 50 dramas, 100 books of verse, and 40 volumes of novels and shorter fiction, and books of essays and philosophy. Tagore was born in 1861, into a wealthy family, his grandfather, Dwarkanath Tagore, was a rich landlord and social reformer. Rabindranath was described by Saha (2001: i) as ‘a product of the Bengal Renaissance’, Tagore was mainly engaged in literary pursuits, mainly known as a poet, his versatile talents extended to different branches of art, such as, novels, short stories, dramas, articles, dance, essays, painting and songs. He was held up as an icon for millions of Indians and Bangladeshis (O’Connell and O’Connell 2008a: 961), his compositions were used in the national anthems for two nations: *Jana-Gana-Mana* (Thou Art the Ruler of All Minds) was adopted as the anthem of all India and *Amar Sonar Bangla* (My Golden Bengal) was embraced by Bangladesh.

In 1913 Tagore became Asia’s first Nobel laureate for his English version of a small volume of poems, *Gitanjali* [Song Offerings]. He also received a Knighthood from the British government in 1915. Tagore was a social reformer, patriot, humanitarian and

⁷⁴ From the 1980s the consumption of public performances amongst British Bengalis in London were commonplace weekend activities with *Bharatanatyam*, *Khattak* (styles of classical dance), musical and drama productions. Parents would usually be paying attention to the stage while their children would find or make friends playing outside the hall or running up and down the side. Sometimes the second generation would perform, especially if they had been tutored in classical dance, singing or music. Mostly however artists were brought over from India or first generation British Bengali artists would perform. For most of the second generation there was a steady decline in participation and interest that developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as studies, other interests and university took them away; although a few maintained their “Indian” activities while studying at university. Second generation Bengalis through concentrating on studies and university social life and then involvement in work life began to see less of each other, sometimes losing contact with childhood Bengali friends, perhaps only seeing them at Durga puja and weddings.

philosopher; where he championed ‘freedom’ in education: physical, mental, spiritual, and moral freedom and freedom from racial and national prejudice (O’Connell and O’Connell 2008a: 965). Tagore was very interested in rural development work, establishing the pioneering Institute for Rural Reconstruction based at Sriniketan. Additionally Tagore attempted to support the neglected Indian village to bring education and self-reliance into the village (Das Gupta 2008). Tagore was also interested in experimenting with educational reform. He had a massive cultural legacy which was a platform from which the Tagore Centre UK had developed.

The Tagore Centre Youth Forum: The beginnings of a Bengali space

The Tagore Centre Youth Forum was established in 1996 by the first generation, to provide a space for a younger generation to meet and learn about Tagore. The Youth Forum had evolved from The Tagore Centre UK. Initially the group of “youth” consisted of the Tagore Centre organiser’s children; they met very infrequently, at Dr. Piyali’s Mukherjee’s home to learn more about Tagore. Piyali Mukherjee, who was a part of the Tagore Centre Committee, was placed in charge of starting a youth group and for increasing the understanding and awareness of the Rabindranath Tagore, his works, the Tagore Centre and to, “eventually take over the Tagore Centre when we are gone,” as she would sometimes say. She ran the meetings in her own home, providing snacks and beverages. Approaching the Millennium and early in 2000s the Tagore Centre began to enlist a larger number of second generation.

It was in early 1998 that I joined the group as it was just starting to draw in the second generation from outside of their immediate circle of friends. Bhombol, an informant told me about the Tagore Centre, describing it as a Bengali “young person’s Tagore group”. That was when I met Piyali Mukherjee, or as I became to know her, “Mala⁷⁵ Auntie” or “Mala Mashi”. The initial participants were wilfully “roped into it” by their parents who were part of the Tagore Centre. The second phase was the bringing in of family friend’s children and their friends. Piyali was a woman in her early fifties, and someone that was considered, “pretty cool”, “nice” and “easy going”, by most second generation people who knew her. She had a PhD in Chemistry from Queen Mary, University of London. She became a secondary school teacher in a North London

⁷⁵ “Mala” was Piyali’s nickname. “Auntie” or “Mashi” is the polite and appropriate terms of respect, shown to elders who would be around one’s mother’s age.

school until her accident;⁷⁶ she was now tutoring Maths and Chemistry from home. She was a first generation, middle class, British Indian Bengali, she was married to a doctor, had two children, played the Spanish guitar (so talented was she that she had performed many times with professional musicians) and lived in North London.

Bhombol had kindly offered to take me in his car. We travelled to a leafy residential suburb in North London. As we approached her home, which was a beautiful, large detached home, surrounded by plants and trees. We entered through her ample, heavy wooden door, through the doorway led onto a large hallway. We were greeted warmly by Mala Auntie, a slim, sweet faced woman, with glasses, short wavy hair, dressed in a casual shirt and trousers. The group left their shoes and coats, in the hallway without being asked, and entered into an enormous lounge with large sofas. The lounge had a skylight at one end of it and the décor was a mixture of Indian and World influences from objects from abroad. There I sat with Bengali “youth”, there were twelve second generation ranging from their early to late twenties. All of the participants at this stage were notably Londoners (or just on the outskirts) unmarried, university students or early career graduates who had entered professional occupations. Amongst the group, there was a civil servant, a doctor, finance professional, an accountant, psychologist, a law student, a medical student, an artist, an interior designer and a Bio-Chemistry PhD student. A third of the group were living at home with their parents, two had their own property and the rest were living in rented accommodation.

The group sat down chatting amongst themselves about their line of work, what they were studying or studied people they knew in common and generally talking about their lives. Mala Aunty asked everyone to introduce themselves and explain why they had attended, most mentioned that they had some familiarity with Tagore, whether they had sung his songs, taken part in dance or musical performances, were interested in his art, stories, ideas or philosophies or simply had contact with it through their parents who were a part of Tagore Centre; or their friends had told them about this group and wanted to find out more about this Bengali figure. Amongst the group was Sheila, a second generation, unmarried psychologist in her mid-twenties, this was the first time that she had attended a Youth Forum meeting. Although her parents lived on the outskirts of

⁷⁶ Mala was knocked over by a car as she was crossing a zebra crossing near her home.

London she lived in rented accommodation in South London to be near her workplace. She became a keen and enthusiastic member of the Youth Forum and took part in all aspects of the Youth Forum, from singing, dancing and dramatic performances to committee business to helping to organise Tagore Centre social nights. She was fluent in Bengali, being able to read, write and sing in Bengali.

Sheila

I think that this [Youth Forum] is a good thing that everyone is getting together and talking about their culture because one thing that is really important is not forgetting your roots, and in the society that we are in because we are born and brought up in a Western culture every one forgets that they are essentially Indian. And I think that it is nice that everyone remembers that they have an Indian culture and a background to them especially if they are from a Bengali background.

Bhombol was an unmarried second generation accountant in his mid-twenties who lived with his parents. This was also Bhombol's first meeting and he became a keen member of the Forum, he had even managed to enlist a few other second generation who were to become members of the Youth Forum. His skills at recruiting members to the Tagore Centre were quite remarkable, as he was particularly adept at being able to promote the social scene that the Tagore Centre had to offer later on. He spoke Bengali fluently, and took part in the performances by the Tagore Centre from 1999 onwards, although less involved in Tagore Centre committee matters, as he had a very "busy social life". However he saw the Youth Forum as an "opportunity to broaden" his "horizons and to meet other people, other Bengali people actually".

Rabin was a chartered accountant; he was in his mid-twenties and unmarried man who was in the process of buying his own flat in North London and was less interested in performing, and more interested in the debates, discussions and committee business. He had moderate fluency in Bengali. His parents were Tagore Centre members and he was one of the original members of the ad hoc Tagore Centre Junior Forum from its inception in 1996. He became involved in earlier part of the Tagore Centre from 1999 onwards and was very involved in organising topics and chairing meetings. As dramatic performances grew, Rabin slowly became less involved.

Lila was an interior designer in her early thirties when she joined the Junior Tagore Centre through Bhombol. She was unmarried and keen to be married to a Bengali. This had been her first time to attend a Tagore Centre Youth Forum meeting. She was fluent in Bengali and was able to read and write in Bengali. She became an extremely pro-active member of the group, who took part in performances, committee business and helping to arrange socials. She expressed how she liked “the fact that we can be involved in dance and singing . . . a chance to be able to express ourselves”. She took part until her marriage to a Bengali man, after which she moved away from London. However, on her return several years later she rejoined and became a part of the Tagore Centre Committee. She remains an active member; one of the few Junior Tagore Centre members to do so.

After introductions Mala Auntie explained the reason the Tagore Centre was set up and the three aims of the Centre. The first was to “propagate Tagore in the West”; the second was “to get Tagore on the national curriculum” and the third was to have an “interested younger generation, to hand the Tagore Centre over to in the future”. Mala Auntie then proposed that the second generation encourage their friends to become interested in attending the group, from then on the ad hoc meetings became regularised and saw a new drive to build up second generation membership. The second generation through snowballing techniques began to encourage their friends into attending; it was Mala Auntie that took the lead in getting people involved. She phoned individuals each month to remind them that there was a meeting on a particular Sunday. Her constant engagement with the Youth Forum developed it and undoubtedly why it was sustained initially. “Aunties” and “Uncles” would often comment that if it were not for Mala Auntie’s input such a project would not have thrived. This was reflected in the Tagore Centre newsletter which commented to that effect:

Our membership within the Junior Committee is increasing strength to strength under the leadership of Piyali [Mala]. (The Tagore Centre UK 1999)

Most first and second generation would agree that she was the driving force within the Forum, pushing it forward, encouraging people to attend and take part in the workings of the Tagore Centre. Mala Auntie encouraged the second generation to bring their friends, she did not specify ethnicity or region. However, the second generation only

relayed the information about the Tagore Centre to their *Bengali* friends, describing it as a second generation *Bengali* group, which proved to be a popular and successful strategy in recruiting new and potential members.

Another significant factor that explained high levels of interest amongst second generation was the great number of unmarried men and women searching for a potential mate. This can be substantiated with the decrease of interest after marriage of the second generation. Whispers by Bengalis of both generations that the Youth Forum was also a way to find a potential marriage partner (as there had been a couple of marriages within and amongst Youth Forum members) caused great offence to Mala Aunty on hearing rumours took the opportunity at the end of one of the performances to make it explicit that the Youth Forum was not “a marriage bureau”. Mala Aunty was particularly concerned as she thought it would put people off coming. Although I met a few new members who came as a direct result of hearing, it was a place to find a possible partner. Tarun was an unmarried second generation, who although not directly stating he had come to the Youth Forum to find a future wife, did often express his wish to be married to a “nice Bengali girl”. He was an IT professional, when he first joined the Youth Forum in 2000 he was approaching his late twenties. He owned his own house near his parents’ home in Middlesex, his father was an engineer and his mother was an administrator. He was moderately fluent in Bengali. He had attended monthly meetings with some regularity, missing only the odd meeting because of work commitments or a social engagement. He took part in several of the productions put on by the Junior Tagore Forum. At the time he was very keen to be a part of a Bengali group, he told me he wanted to “take part, understand and enjoy being Bengali”. He became an enthusiastic member of the group, who was keen on dramatic performances, although not so eager on taking on committee commitments due to “demands of my work”.

During his time at the Tagore Centre in 2002, he married Anjali, a Bengali from Calcutta, with high parental involvement. He took part in performances and attended Tagore Centre meetings regularly after he was married, although Anjali herself from Calcutta, was not so enthused with coming to the Youth Forum monthly meetings

although she attended the socials that were organised by the group. She said that dramatics, performances and debates were not really what she was interested in.⁷⁷

Mala Auntie's wish for the younger generation to take over the Centre "when we are gone", reflected the broader fears of the first generation, that in not transplanting their cultural traditions that they would be leaving their offspring rootless. This fear of losing a connection caused this drive to 'educate' their children (Khandelwal 2000) whether through "Indian culture" or "Bengali culture," through music, dance, literature, learning the Bengali language, drama and a general awareness of "Indian culture" and "Bengali culture". Kapferer (1988) makes a similar case that culture is integral in the development of an ethnic group. The Youth Forum became largely second generation, British Bengali Hindu group, although there were a few Bengalis from India and one Christian. Regular meetings themselves were rarely attended by any other group.⁷⁸ This responded to the commonly expressed view amongst second generation that there was no specific second generation Bengali space, they expressed that the only time they saw other second generation was when they attended *Durga Puja*, weddings or funerals. There were frequent comparisons to other South Asian communities that had second generation spaces, and these were often discussed when new member arrived to the Tagore Centre. There was often a sense of relief to have found a space:

⁷⁷ There were certain patterns that emerged from those who were heavily involved in the Tagore Centre of the 9 men who were heavily involved over a period from 1999-2006 during that period, 5 of them (63 %) had high levels of parental involvement in their marriage, marrying a Bengali woman from India. 7 of the men (78 %) married a Bengali woman, two of which were self selecting. The remaining 2 were unmarried. Of the 7 second generation women that were heavily involved in the Tagore Centre 1999-2006, 4 (57 %) married Bengalis, all of which were self-selecting marriages. 1 woman had a self-selecting marriage with an Indian man, the other two women were unmarried. Of the most involved second generation in the Youth Forum, 18% more men and 16% more women were likely to marry a Bengali. Men were 20% more likely to have parental involvement in their marriages although women's likelihood of having parental involvement remained a less desirable root regardless of ethnicity and/or language/region of their marriage partner.

⁷⁸ While there were a few Muslim Bangladeshis that had come into the group at one time or another it was usually clear by the nature of the discussions that this was mainly a "Hindu" group. That individual would never be told that they were not welcome, on the contrary they would be asked to come again, but it would be clear that this was a group that would celebrate mostly Hindu festivals, Tagore based celebrations and a Christmas celebration. On one such occasion in January 2004 when a Bangladeshi Muslim, Kalid, a friend of one of the regular attendees came into the group and while he was asked to come back and to feel welcome, it was clear to him, with the talk of *Holi*, that it was clearly a mainly Indian Bengali Hindu space. He did not come back. This was not the only occasion where a Bangladeshi Muslim came, never to return again. This Bengali, predominantly Hindu space, was reinforced through the associations made by the attendees with Tagore, notions of being Bengali and later Hindu celebrations being celebrated by the group.

Rishi

I agree with what they are both saying, I've seen a lot of the other communities – Gujarati and Sikh communities and the Muslim community and they are all tight knit and close and they have a lot more fun and a lot more interaction and we meet once a year at *puja* and we say we'll meet up and we don't see each other until the next year. But here I have met quite a few people and we met up for evening socials as well and that is nice. Probably without the Tagore Centre I probably wouldn't have done that. It is a real a forum for meeting people.

Robin

I think that it is good in a way that this thing is happening as well and that it has lasted for so long, because I have tried to get involved with other societies similar to this and they didn't work out and it is nice to see that this has been going on for so long. I feel like that the Bengali community in the UK, we are a big community but we do not pull together like Gujaratis and Sikhs.

Sonali

It is amazing how many people there are, you just go to Kings Cross [Camden *Durga puja*] and you are bombarded but otherwise you just don't see them . . . I think that it is only when we go to *puja* that you think I wonder where all these Bengalis have come from. You just don't see them around.

Amit

They just crawl out of the woodwork . . . I think that one of the things that you have got to pin down is why is it that the Bengali community are like that, why do we not have such a tight knit community like the Gujaratis. It would be interesting to explore that at some point.

The members expressed how other South Asians had “tight knit communities” and “we meet once a year at *puja*”. There was a sense of loss expressed by many of the attendees of the Tagore Centre meetings, who felt that second generation British Indian Bengalis had no space of their own or even a sense of “community”. This rhetoric of yearning for “a space” and being a “tight knit community” was often mentioned by some second generation but rarely acted upon. In comparison their parents regularly met socially with their Bengali friends, whether having dinner with another couple or larger collective events such as smaller *pujas* throughout the year, weekly or monthly *kirtans*⁷⁹, functions, cultural evenings, going on trips together, this all reflected a stronger social cohesion amongst their first generation parents. Turner (1982) drawing

⁷⁹ Devotional religious chanting of hymns and mantras, usually accompanied with musical instruments such as a harmonium.

on Durkheim describes collective celebrations as “generally connected with expectable culturally shared events”; thus when a social group celebrates a particular event it “celebrates itself” by “manifesting in symbolic form what it conceives to be its essential life”. This lack of shared events amongst the second generation was very much acknowledged and often expressed by new members when they first came into the Youth Forum meetings.

Youth Forum Meetings

The Youth Forum meetings were jointly organised by the first and second generation. Sometimes the second generation with a special interest in Tagore, Bengal, film-making or the arts would present their work; while others would initiate discussions or debates. Mala Auntie would often invite external speakers academics, “authoritative” voices on a subject, leaders in a field or people heading groups. Debates and discussions on Indian Freedom Fighters, Indian Independence, Bramho Samaj, Tagorian art, music and ideology. The most popular meetings were second generation led, they were often the discussions on arranged marriages and issues around ethnicity/identity. “Hot” topics such as “marriage”, “arranged marriage” and “identity” were always well attended. There was certainly a hunger for this type of discussion which was well illustrated through the attendance and the discussions that ensued.

Youth Forum meetings were generally moderately attended, with good meetings having over twenty participants while quieter meetings had less than ten. By 2001, the Junior forum had grown too large for Mala Auntie’s home, so another location needed to be found. This was when Uncle (Dr. Mukherjee, Auntie’s husband) suggested his tennis club not far from their home, as the new venue. He was able to take out a slot for a reasonable fee every month from 5pm until 7pm on the last Sunday of the month. Thus the regular Tagore Centre Youth Forum meetings were held on the last Sunday of the month, at the tennis courts by Southgate tube station. People came initially from and in and around Southgate, North London, North East London and Essex. The Tagore Centre started to flourish, people came from further a field, such as West London and South London. This was when the Tagore Centre would begin to charge for membership. Annual membership cost £24 for working members or £12 for students and would cover the cost for the venue, and snacks – usually in the form of sandwiches,

crisps and coke, and if we were really lucky Indian savouries. Initially the Youth Forum depended on the kindness of the “Aunties” (a couple of Mala Aunty’s friends) who volunteered to make the sandwiches. The meetings were attended by regular members, those who became involved in projects, a few other members who would appear intermittently however still paid their membership money, there were those who appeared once or twice a year and those who appeared once never to return. As the group grew they questioned their purpose, questioned the aims of the Tagore Centre, in particular their ability to “propagate Tagore”:

Hiran: From that, that the senior committee had three main aims, it seems that from what people are saying that two of those aims are fairly common. A lot of people saying that they are interested in their art and the literature coming out of India, specifically the Bengali stuff and the networking bit and the other elements, how about propagating our literature to the wider community, what do you feel about this?

Prabir: I am not sure about propagating something I do not know much about, which in some ways hits the nail on the head and goes to the heart of the matter. Most members are limited in their understanding of Tagore as they have not had a lot of exposure to it. While some may sing it, others may dance it, yet others may have acted in it, read some of his works or art. Knowledge may be passed down in parts from their parents, however knowledge is quite limited to individuals, although a lot more has been learnt from coming into these groups. I don’t feel that I am qualified to propagate Tagore.

Hiran: Is that something that the junior committee should be helping with and how?
[Mumblings from the group]

Prabir’s open questioning addressed a wider concern voiced by second generation who did not attend regularly or at all. While the Youth Forum had a paid membership over sixty members at its height, there were over 100 second generation who had attended at least one Tagore Centre meeting and several others who only attended Tagore Centre socials. Shati, a second generation woman, refused to attend Tagore Centre meetings, even though several of her Bengali friends had tried to encourage her to go. She was critical of identifying herself in terms of being “just a Bengali”, in terms of having an uncritically bounded notion of Indian culture. Shati refused to be involved with the Youth Forum meetings, considering it to be too “cliquey” and felt that it had encouraged a rigid understanding of what it meant to be “Bengali”.

Shati

I mean it's good that there are things like that [Tagore Centre Youth Forum] to bring us all into the community. It would be nice to keep some connection, but I think under a general sort of thing I think it's kind of cliquey and . . . of course we want to know about our language and our culture but I think that we should broaden ourselves. I think that some Bengalis have these kinds of things, like a check list or something and then you're fine you know you can be a proper Bengali, like *kati*, you know what *kati* means? [*I shake my head, to indicate no.*] Like the real thing, like kosher. So because I don't do all of those kosher things I'm not seen as a proper Bengali, I don't think that it's right considering that we weren't brought up in India, we were brought up outside of India, so considering this we should be going that other way.

Shati describes in her own words the regulation of ethnic authenticity as woven into one's level of religious knowledge, cultural knowledge, as well as the performing the ever elusive "Bengaliness" when called for. Shati felt that she did not conform to the particular types of knowledge that were required by "some Bengalis," particularly through organisations such as the Tagore Centre. Shati's comments like the actions of most of the non-meeting-attending second generation challenged the rigid boundaries that Gilroy (1993: 83-84) describes in 'strategies of cultural insiderism' in regards to ethnicity; where rigid boundaries to 'rhetorical strategies of cultural insiderism' that support the 'absolute sense of ethnic difference' and 'construct the nation [or national identification] as ethnically homogenous.' Shati had had some 'run-ins' with a few members of the Youth Forum, who had questioned her "Bengaliness" for not being able to recount a particular religious story and not joining in with the Tagore Centre. For a few members of the Youth Forum, such as Bhombol, Anjali and Deb, being a part of the Tagore Centre was also a means to symbolically affirm and perform ethnicity and a demarcated second generation Bengali space. Shati was interested in both the social and "cultural" side of the Tagore Centre, she felt uncomfortable with what she felt was the rigidity that came from building an 'authentic' "Bengaliness" that was espoused by a few of the Youth Forum's members. More commonly the second generation who attended socials attempted to negotiate a location within their ethnicity whilst resisting essentialising their ethnicity, as Shati expresses above. Shati had attended several of the socials organised by the Youth Forum, but not the meetings, she did however attend one of the Youth Forum's dramatic performances.

Shati

I did attend one of the plays *Chira Kumar Sabbha*, it was really amazing how all the group [Youth Forum] had learnt *shuddho Bangla* [described as “standard Bengali,” “good Bengali” or Bengali “as written in literature”]. It was good to see it but it was hard for me to understand, all the parents really enjoyed it, they thought it was hilarious. I did get the general gist of it though. I wish though there was something more that I could relate to, it would be great if the second generation could do something modern, something that applied to us. The rest of the cultural evening was obviously good with professional musicians and singers, but not really my thing. I only went because a couple of my friends were in it otherwise I really don’t think I would have gone.

That is why I go to the other stuff like the boat parties and nights out, they are actually fun, they are not about how fantastic your *shudho Bangla* is it is a night out, having a good time. That is good enough for me.

Ajit a second generation IT consultant, who also attended only the Youth Forum socials, said:

Ajit

. . . because they [performances] are so boring. I used to go to them when I was young [a child], I didn’t like them then either and I don’t now. The good thing about the boat parties was that it had nothing to do with it [Tagore]. Tagore for me has no attraction, it is very boring, his poetry and plays, why would they [Tagore Centre/Youth Forum] assume that every Bengali would want to know about Tagore, it is like asking English people if they could quote a Shakespearean play . . . I tried to read *Gitanjali*, man is that boring, I can’t see the “delight” that people profess to see in it.

Many of the second generation, especially men, expressed similar sentiments about Tagore. They felt removed from Tagore’s work, particularly the use of Tagorian language, which was indistinguishable from their more everyday use, even the most accomplished bi-lingual second generation struggled to understand the nuances of language without guidance. Performing Tagorian works for many of the second generation was not how they wished to define and create cultural boundaries. While his impact as a prolific and influential writer and person, respectively, were acknowledged, but for many of the second generation who attended Youth Forum socials alone, Tagore was a distant figure that they were not able to relate to. Driven chiefly by the first generation and a few of the second generation using markers of “culture” primarily

“Tagore”, amateur dramatics, performances of cultural shows, discussions and socialising as a way to locate themselves.

By 2002 Mala Auntie’s explanation of the Tagore Centre’s aims, the third aim was transformed from her earlier explanations in getting *people* interested in becoming a part of the Tagore Centre, she was now using the term “to network within your *own community*” as a part of the third aim for the Youth Forum and thus moving into the Tagore Centre in the future. The third aim was for The Tagore Centre to continue and for the next generation of Tagore Centre members to carry on the work already started. However, the explicit mentioning of “network[ing] within your own community” in Mala Auntie’s own words, “cannot be overlooked”. It was a definite turning point and one that recognises the way the Youth Forum had evolved, and was developing a space for the second generation.

Friendships amongst the group began to develop which helped maintain the group and build on it. Mala Auntie had always stated that she wanted to have less and less direct involvement with the Youth Forum as time went on, she wanted it to be something that “the youth” were to carry on. She said at the very beginning that she wanted the youth to “have ownership” and that there was a three year plan, the first was for her to establish the Forum and to run the whole thing, the second would be the passing over of certain responsibilities to the second generation and the third was to hand over the reins completely. The three year plan, became more of a three stage plan, as the building up and maintenance of membership was slow and gruelling. The initial phase carried on in earnest until October 1999 and the beginnings of the second phase was put into and continued to be put into place until late 2000. The second phase, perhaps the longest, was where individuals were beginning to really get involved with the Youth Forum. The most involved of experiences surrounding the dramatic performances.

Dramatic performance

There were many instances in which the second generation began to stage dramatic performances the ‘literal staging of culture’ (Schein 1999: 377) which was supported by the main Tagore Centre (first generation). The dramatic performances put on by the Tagore Centre Youth Forum were undoubtedly shaped by first generation input. The

first generation chose the first play that we were to dramatise⁸⁰, Tagore's *Tasher Desh* [*Card Country*]. There was a lot of interest expressed by the second generation. The initial suggestion was to have Abhik Uncle, who was a member of the senior committee, (and had written many books on Tagore's life) to direct *Tasher Desh* as a dance drama. Uncle Abhik came to talk to the Youth Forum. He told them that he had already got people to play the leads from outside of the Tagore Centre, from a dance troop. He told the group about the plot of the play, which people seemed to like, and in principle sounded pretty good. It was about a prince who discovers a land where people are made of cards (like *Alice in Wonderland*) and have never heard of laughter, love or singing. And the prince through example shows them the joy of human emotion.

There were several issues that were troubling the group: firstly that the director was not open to suggestions of the group; secondly this sounded more like an "outside production", where members of the Tagore Centre were playing extras, and dance extras at that, which many argued the men in the group would be quite resistant to. Uncle left the room and the group decided that this was not working as they thought it would. The group argued that Uncle's ideas were "fixed," the roles were limited to extras, and the Junior Centre members appeared to have minimal input in the direction of the play, thus they unanimously rejected the idea of *Tasher Desh* as it was then. They felt that it would not get full participation and that it was not appropriate for the group. The news was broken to Uncle through the groups' natural intermediary, Mala Auntie. Uncle did not return to the room that day.

Mala Auntie after some thought organised a workshop, Lucy Oliver (a freelance director) was to facilitate a workshop on *Tasher Desh*, which saw the second generation gain a real enthusiasm for the play. The senior committee of the Tagore Centre decided to pay for the junior members of the Tagore Centre to go on a two day workshop with Lucy, which if successful, would work with and direct *Card Country* which was in the process of being translated by Dr. William Radice, who was giving the group advanced manuscripts. There were twelve individuals taking part. It was something that the group valued as it was a chance also to get to know each other. Lucy, a veteran director

⁸⁰ The first performance by the Junior Centre was a dance drama performed by a few of the women in the group, which was done as a part of The Arts Worldwide Bangladesh Festival (The performance was at North Westminster Community School on the 9th July 1999.) It was through sheer frequency of rehearsals, even though it was regarded as not enough, that people began getting to know one another.

had worked on Tagore before saying that she had a great interest in Tagore, so much so that she had visited Shantiniketan several times, she had also directed *The Post Office* (another of Tagore's plays). After a successful workshop, the Tagore Centre commissioned her to work with the group on *Tasher Desh*.

The rehearsals with Lucy went well for the second generation who felt comfortable with her directing style. However there was a lot of anger expressed when a delegation of six aunties and uncles insisted on seeing the whole play from start to finish to make sure it was "appropriate" to be shown. Mala Auntie, the second generation's intermediary broke the news to the group, which was met with "Why do they have to be concerned?" Tarun argued, "What is their problem?" "Why can't they just leave it to us, they can see it in a couple of week's time?" said Anjali. "They just want to see if it is all right, they are paying for the sessions, they just want to see it," said Mala Auntie. No one wanted to argue with Mala Auntie, knowing that she was caught in the middle of the whole thing, so conceded to their wishes. The Aunties and Uncles watched the group's performance, they liked it, it was deemed "acceptable". It was a difficult situation for the group, as they reflected on how they were financed and supported by the first generation, the space to participate and be "educated" in one's heritage was subject to provisos of their benefactors, first generation Tagore Centre. The situation had become a metaphor for the intergenerational relationship that had developed within the rehearsals. For the second generation of young men and women, in high powered employment, were in many cases living independently of their parents this authority proved to be a difficult moment. In attempting to produce a performance, where they were attempting to (with Lucy's guidance) contribute and embrace Tagore as young adults the "youth" in the Youth Forum, expressed their feelings of being undermined but also a sense of relief that the "aunties" and "uncles" were appeased. This production was indeed financially supported by Tagore Centre, it was also argued that the second generation were representing the Tagore Centre's name. I spoke to Mala Auntie some more,

Mala

It is great what you are all doing, but they just want to be sure that what you guys are not doing something. . . . yes they did like the different interpretation of the group, they were pleased to see

you young people interested in Tagore. This is what we all wanted.

In *Card Country* the second generation had negotiated their working with Lucy, and had to concede to the authenticating and acceptability by select first generation of their modified performances to present to outsiders. In their performing of *Tasher Desh* the first generation acted as gate keepers to authenticating “Bengali culture”. There was a certain degree of acknowledging first generation expertise and authenticity, but the second generation also wanted to find new ways in which to express their Bengalianness. This performance expresses what Juan Flores refers to as ‘the problem of contemporaneity,’ the simultaneous ‘coexistence of tradition and modernity’ (2000: 21) where second-generation youth are struggling with notions of seemingly diminishing ‘traditions’ which are threatened by inauspicious presentations. This antagonism within *Tasher Desh* was a critical site for understanding the ways in which second generation were positioning themselves in the landscape of ethnic politics, as it showcased quite literally their performances of *an* ethnic authenticity. Amongst this small group, they appeared to contradict the confidence with which they carried in other parts of their lives such as living away from home, their financial independence post education, their parent’s varying acceptance of non-Bengali marriage partners and the acceptance of self-selecting marriages. Yet these otherwise independent second generation were negotiating and forced to seek the approval of first generation authenticity in this instance. However, the sense of performing and being amongst a Bengali peer group was at that point one of the very few spaces that could be described as a second generation “Bengali” site. On the 29th of October 2000, the “junior group” of the Tagore Centre (as they were described then) put on the first drama performance as a group.⁸¹ It was to form a part of cultural evening which was to be on the final day of “A three-day international symposium: *Rabindranath Tagore: A Creative Unity A millennium conference/celebration*”, to which many academics were invited and whom attended. It was held at the Chancellor's Hall, Senate House, part of the University of London (although the play itself was staged at The Intimate Theatre in North London). It was well received by the audience, who enjoyed Lucy’s interpretation. The audience

⁸¹ Although this was the second performance presented by the group. The first was at North Westminster Community School, the venue for *Tagore Night* where members of the Youth Forum performed Tagore's dance drama *Shyama* and his song *Touch My Heart with the Touchstone of Fire*. The evening's celebrations and performances were part of the 1999 *Arts Worldwide Bangladesh Festival*.

was mostly comprised of the first generation who were thrilled with the performance and gave rapturous applause.

Many second generation were also very enthusiastic about the performances and this was reflected in the increase in membership that followed. It even managed to encourage a few second generation Bengalis who were previously unsure about joining, to take out a membership with the Tagore Centre. After the success of the first drama presented by the Youth Forum, the second generation were keen to do more drama, music and dance, both of Tagore and others. However, it was the first generation who again suggested the second generation become involved with *Chirakumar Sabha* (Tagore's comedy *Ever-Bachelors' Club*)⁸² in Bengali in its original form, untranslated and unrecognisable to the colloquial-speaking second generation. The second generation were very keen to be involved, especially as it was to learn to speak in literary prose. The mentioning of doing another play was met with eighteen people arriving, some wanting to being involved with the backstage or music, singing and acting parts. However, I noticed eyes widen with the first reading of the almost alien language.

A director, an Indian actress from India, Rajani, in her thirties, agreed to direct us. The audition for parts caused the first of many conflicts between the director and the cast. On first arriving to auditions, she placed the second generation in a line assessing height, beauty/handsomeness and “look” and stating her findings aloud; then based on physical criteria and singing ability the group were each assigned a part. Most of the group got a part. I was to be Nirmala, an orphan girl under the guardianship of her Mama (maternal uncle) who wanted to join the Bachelor’s club. Rehearsals were often gruelling, all struggling to pronounce the previously unpronounceable, although several aunties had made the process easier by writing the script phonetically for the second generation cast. The second generation then tried hard with the help of aunties and with extra tutorship from their parents.

There were many points of conflict that developed with the director, on her dictatorial style and approach with the second generation. Cast members would often use

⁸² *Chirakumar Sabha* was chosen by the first generation as there were many characters, which they felt could accommodate Junior Tagore Centre members that were interested in participating in the play.

subversive methods to disrupt proceedings, much to the delight of the rest of the group, such as playing a scene out of character or making jokes that would require a more British idiosyncratic understanding which often (but not always) went over the head of the mystified Rajani. There was an attempt to oust her from the role, but the group were unable to find another director to take up the role, without payment, and Rajani despite her style was committed and generous in her time and effort. Other disagreements were about levels of “commitment” to the play as most of the cast were full-time professionals who would sometimes work late or in the weekends. However, despite all the conflict the second generation kept coming. Matters came to a head one evening at Mala Auntie’s home, where the group was questioned as to their levels of commitment to the play by Mala Auntie and the director, when there were groans as they were presented with a spreadsheet detailing an intense work schedule requiring the whole cast to attend all rehearsals (of the two and half hour play). However the group of second generation made a vigorous defence as to their commitment and an attack on the worksheet:

Tarun

Look Auntie, I work hard all day at work and sometimes I cannot turn up. I cannot do all the dates on this worksheet, I can’t. I really enjoy my part it is great but I have commitment elsewhere as well as well.

Kakoli

Auntie, I have been working all day and I have travelled for six hours for work today and then I travelled for another hour to come here and then I will travel another hour back home. Believe me I am committed, we all are, why would we be here on a Friday night if we weren’t committed.

Bobby

Auntie, it is really kind that you are opening your home to us and I know that we all love doing this, but we have other things as well. We want this play to work and we are working hard, we’ve come a long way already, I know you want it right and we will do our best but may be we could work in a different way, we don’t all need to be here at the same time, some of the cast, have only a couple of lines, it is not fair to expect them to be there the whole time.

Mala Auntie listened to the second generation and said that she would have a think about what to do. At the next rehearsal the cast were given an amended spreadsheet, with the same number of rehearsals but not all members were required to attend every rehearsal. The second generation group were pleased and this led to a relatively conflict-free rehearsal period there afterward. After months of rehearsals, the first performance was given. There was an audience of over two hundred, mainly first generation, reflecting the first generation's distinctive Bengali regional appetite for Tagore. The first generation laughed at the ironies and subtle language contained within the play, I observed that there were two moments in the play where the first generation audience laughed to the mystification of the cast. While the second generation of Bengalis were able to follow the gist of the story they struggled to understand individual Bengali words, but, were impressed with the second generation cast performances. The majority of the second generation felt removed from these performances, unable to understand Tagorian language and disinterested in a dead Bengali poet. Most of the second generation that I came across were reluctant to sing, perform or be paraded in front of the first generation (the main consumers of Tagore).

Unlike the Youth Forum meetings that had a larger appeal to the second generation, the performances tended to repel the majority of second generation members⁸³. In trying to 'ethnicise' Bengali culture particularly through the cultural evenings was to move it away from a popular culture which was considerably more appealing to the second generation, which was illustrated through the popularity of the "socials" that the Youth Forum hosted.

Tagore Centre Socials

The Youth Forum social events were the most removed from the first generation involvement, they usually involved the hiring of night clubs, boat parties and dinners. Second generation would invite friends, mostly second generation Bengalis and a few non-Bengalis, especially other Indians but not exclusively so. No first generation came, nor was there any suggestion that they should. The socials were not held in direct opposition to the Youth Forum performances, but as an alternative or complementary

⁸³ Although there were several new members who were attracted to performing, they formed the minority.

event, and the first generation hoped as a recruiting ground for the Youth Forum. However the disparity in attendance amongst the second generation perhaps exhibited the wider rejection of Tagore plays and music as repositories of their identities, let alone their 'ethnic authenticity'. Beyond the second generation participants in the Youth Forum performances, and their close friends supporting their endeavours, there was a definite effort to distance notions of a Tagorian ethnic nostalgia from their social space of choice.

Certainly there was an element of resistance to parental authority in these spaces, where as Maira (2002: 44-46) notes of Cohen (1976) that the 'sub-cultural solution' continues to be a 'representational solution to the crises of youth' or perhaps more convenient in the case of second generation adult Bengalis. In all the socials, Tagorian music, art, literature and dance played little to no part in the evening, beyond being a name on the ticket or flyer. Events were usually promoted and publicised on the basis of eating, drinking and dancing to hip-hop, R n' B, *bhangra* and pop. In contrast to the cultural evenings, the socials were aspiring to be what Maira (2002) describes as 'urban cool'. The early Birmingham theorists considered youth subcultures as endeavours to symbolically resolve the tensions between the larger group culture, or 'parent culture,' to which they belonged and their own generational concerns (Clarke et al 1976).

The socials were not, however, oppositional in their construct to their parents. Their search for spaces, were not a 'between two cultures' framework, based on stereotypes and reductionist generalisations; where second generation were constructed as caught between unchanging, backward tradition opposed to the modern norms of "White" society, thus as Ballard describes these young people as having 'never experienced their culture in the totality of its original context' (Ballard 1979: 109). Neither were they 'clandestine clubbers,' experiencing an 'identity crisis'; where differences were applied in the context of 'problems' of communities in 'assimilating' their cultural habits with those of the majority community (Ahmad 2001: 72), thus suggesting that the second generation's experience of Indian culture was outside of its original context; making the second generation the sole agents of historical change in response to the West (Brah 1996: 41-42; Ahmad 2001). Both generations and cultures, far from clashing, saw the emergence of a 'third space' as a shift away from notions of culture origins as pure, discreet starting points (Bhabha 1990: 211).

The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity . . . is the 'third space'; which enables other positions to emerge. The third space displaces the histories that constitute it. (1990: 211)

These 'decentred structures' that are reconstituted at the margins and borders (1990: 210-221) is something that Hall also engages with, linking the creation of the 'in-between or "third" spaces,' with notions of 'diaspora' (1999: 10). Hall considers the complex understandings on which young people draw upon and reproduce forms of culture, where hybridity is a politics which must displace homogenisation. Ahmad (2001: 73) argues that like Bhabha's 'third space', Hall's 'diaspora' constructs a 'non-coercive and more diverse conception of ethnicity' which have to be 'embraced' to challenge essentialist constructions. However, these notions of 'third space' that Bhabha and Hall discuss are contested by the complexity of the second generation's yearning to be perceived as Indian 'but not in a stereotypical or exotic fashion . . . to have an anti-essentialized view of an essentially labelled group' (Murthy 2007: 238). The lack of density of ties within the group was felt when contrasting themselves as a regional group with other South Asian groups; together with the high levels of 'acculturation' into British middle class society. Eriksen (1993) argues the broader point of group recognition, of how to gain identification of an ethnic/regional group, they must essentialise, or create boundaries, distinguishing themselves (Barth 1969). These second generation Bengalis were trying through various means to find a *Bengali* space for their generation.

For the second generation Bengalis socials were less about mediating multiplicity as was the case for Maira's second generation in New York, who were entering subcultures through "desi parties" as a way to manage contradictions between social spheres of parents' culture and mainstream American peer culture (2002: 42-46). The end of the "social" evening did not mean the return to the constraints of parents, peers and community (S. Cohen 2005; Gelder 2005) which necessitates the 'switching' of situational identities (Maira 2002; Jhutti 1998; Raj 2003) which was not apparent amongst the second generation Bengalis, largely due to the reduction of polarisation between first and second generations. *Bengali culture* for the second generation was much less understood in terms of being "pure" in comparison to a "seductive" or

“polluting” *British culture*, reflected in the Chapter 5, “*Modern” Bengali Women*. Social life for second generation children was not mapped strongly into discrete cultural lifestyles, multi-layered identification was encouraged as London schools acknowledged to varying extents the religious festivals and social activities; likewise at home and at the weekend “non-Indian” activities were supported. With reduced levels of these paradoxes, going to a Tagore Centre “social” was a chance to carve out a Bengali second generation space as a form of ethnic identity expression, rather than an escape from parental sanction. Second generation Bengalis already participated in “British” popular culture: going to night clubs, parties, dinners in single or mixed gender groups and various ethnicities.

As Murthy (2007) indicates, for South Asians, *bhangra* often encourages a sense of ownership of *bhangra*, which he argues, ‘illustrates that some Asians have been attracted to scenes created by Asians not just because they may enjoy the music, but because they feel they can claim an ‘authentic’ ownership of the scene on a ‘quasi-primordial’, ‘brown skin’ level’ (236). This is reflected in those who attend the “socials”, who tended to be Bengali if not Indian and particularly Hindu. This ‘rooting’, Gilroy argues, is best not employed because of their essentialising quality (2000: 12-13); however, it is this essentialising or ‘rooting’ that is appealing.

‘Rooting’ the scene to something Asian usually is invoked for two key reasons . . . for solidarity and community – strategic essentialism. Second, it occurs for more personal and ontological purposes; that is, these individuals feel that essentializing this scene as ‘Asian’, to some extent, is part of a process of self-definition into comfortable discrete particulars. (Murthy: 2007: 238)

The blaring incongruity that occurs is why this second generation of professional, educated, middle class individuals have chosen to identify with being “Bengali” at this moment in time. Many had mentioned their lack of “community” amongst the second generation in comparison to other British South Asian groups and indeed the first generation, expressing an ethnic envy over their sense of distinctive cultural traits of other South Asian, comparing their abandonment of their own. This resulted in a self-reflexive activity of identity construction (Baumann 1997); using socials as a way to create a coherent group.

Previously, at other stages of their lives, the second generation sought to employ strategies of anti-essentialised ethnic identity, but these socials moved closer to producing a sense of “community” amongst the metropolitan second generation. This change could partly be attributed to a sense of a yearning to preserve an authentic ethnic identity, yet there appeared to be little consensus and/or regulation of what that authenticity comprised of. These Bengali spaces were positioned along lines of ethnicity, class, education, age, and sexual orientation although unlike Maira’s (2002) second generation American Indians where there was a desire to maintain an ‘authentic’ ethnic identity. Amongst the Bengali second generation there was less essentialising of ‘being Indian,’ used as a standardised authenticity and ‘goodness’; for the majority of second generation that I encountered, the recasting of “community” took on a more cosmopolitan character where ethnic authenticity was not rigidly adhered to. This was not to deny ‘measures of identity’ to evaluate ethnic authenticity, however much less so. Having entered these second generation, middle class, Bengali sites of temporary and contextualised identities, separate from the other social circles, they were moving away from constructing themselves in essentialist terms. Amongst the group subculture capital was fused unpredictably with cultural capital; as conversation entered realms of work, interests, home and car ownership, then onto music tastes for example. Non-verbal cultural and sub-cultural capital was also assessed in terms of clothes worn, “handling one’s drink” and prowess on the dance floor. Thornton’s excellent insight that class does not correlate in ‘any-one-way with levels of youthful sub-cultural capital’ where ‘class is wilfully obfuscated by sub-cultural distinctions’ (2005: 187) perhaps captures the variability of dynamic between cultural and sub-cultural capital amongst the second generation. I certainly witnessed this adoption of obscuring middle class background by a few of the younger second generation men in an attempt to convey ‘hipness’ (Thornton 2005) or ‘cool’. For most however, regardless of their adoption of a classlessness, there was certainly an identification with particular dance styles which had its roots through “Black” subculture particularly through *hip hop* and *R n’ B*; there was identification with *Bangra* and to a lesser extent to Bollywood soundtracks.

R n’ B and *hip hop* have been written about as sources of empowerment (see Maira 2002); where there are moves towards an emphasising and identifying further with an

Indian ethnicity. The 'Black style' that was adopted was also to gain sub-cultural capital, as well as appreciation of "good music" as opposed to identification with limited options for economic mobility for example. For the purposes of this thesis R n' B is somewhat a red herring, Christenson and Roberts (1998) observes that 'rap/hip hop culture most defines the pop cultural cutting edge, thus providing adolescents concerned with 'coolness' and peer status' (1998: 111). Certainly at these events there were assertions of cultural, social and economic capital. As the group had passed adolescence and also of an age and life-experience where clubbing, drinking and having a boy/girlfriend was not an act of rebellion against parents there was less *subculture* in this particular breed of Bengali subculture. Thus sub-cultural capital although far from irrelevant was less anchored in the lives of the second generation; and cultural capital was very much an underlying distinction, even in these circumstances.

The Spot Bar

Rahoul, a second generation man in his late twenties, worked in the City of London as a management consultant. He had become involved with the Youth Forum after the production of *Tasher Desh*, and had become a committed member of the group. He became involved in the organising of the socials. When discussing venues for the first Youth Forum event, he suggested *The Spot Bar*, in Covent Garden, London, which was met with "Ahh" from the rest of the group. He said that they had a space at the top of the bar that would allow parties and a DJ and that we were able to hire the hall for relatively little, making money on the tickets, as long as we were able to get enough people interested in the club night out. Placed in the centre of London, it appealed to the rest of the group, rather than a venue on the outskirts of London, the centrality and desirability of the location suggested the 'urban', the 'cool' and the cosmopolitan. Rahoul said that he would sort out the music with the DJ. Rahoul with help from other members made the arrangements, set the date, organised the initial payment, which was paid for by the Tagore Centre. Entrance would be five pounds for students and seven pounds for non-students, profits made would go back to the Tagore Centre, in trust for the Youth Forum.

The night was advertised through email, telephone and word of mouth, by mostly second generation. There was a lot of excitement around having a night organised for Bengalis, a new experience for most of them. Members invited friends, mostly

Bengalis, but also a few other Indians. I arrived early to see if there was any additional help needed. I walked through the vibrant Covent Garden, in central London to make my way to the Spot Bar. I walked through a large smoky, softly lit bar to make my way to the back where there were some stairs leading up to the dance floor, there was a bouncer on the door who let me through. Once upstairs, I saw Rahoul had everything in hand, with Minati helping with the tickets and money on the door. The windowless upper hall which was also dimly lit with reddish lighting with dark plain walls, with a dance floor, a bar and a seating area along one side of the space. The DJ was by the entrance in a booth, where he had his decks and records, playing a mix of R n'B and pop. Once in, I recognised many Youth Forum members and several of their friends, all Indian. No one was dancing when I arrived; there was a lot of mingling, drinking, smoking and introductions being made. It was an over eighteens event, most of those who came were single however there were several couples who also attended, the second generation who were there were generally between their twenties and mid-thirties. The second generation included students as well as professionals and was considered a place where young people could to meet up with friends and make new acquaintances.

Many women wore revealing clothes such as halter tops, skirts and dresses exposing their legs, arms, backs and/or stomachs. Men wore smart and fitted casual shirts or designer T-shirts, smart trousers and shoes which was low key, reflecting what Farrer (2005: 484) describes as 'an emotional cool' where there was an attempt to present a 'social sophistication'.

Over ninety people turned up to the Spot Bar, amongst them, second generation smokers, mainly men stood watching and talking on the edges of the dance floor inhaling their cigarettes often with a drink close at hand. Men and women were intermittently drinking and dancing, jumping up when "good tracks" came on or moving away when they were tired or not so keen on particular tunes. Musical tastes varied amongst the group and there was a table where a few men did not get up to dance for the duration of the evening, confining themselves to conversation and drinking amongst themselves (or with other intermittent dancers) and observing. The DJ played an eclectic selection, however weighing more on the side of R n' B and "hip hop" which proved to be particularly popular amongst the group. Towards the end of the evening

bhangra music was played, which the group enjoyed, although there were a few complaints from some of the women saying that there was “too much *bhangra*” where a couple of second generation men “took over the dance floor” in attempts to demonstrate their erudite *bhangra* moves.

Throughout the evening the dance floor heaved with the masses of bodies dancing, to the beats and rhythms of the music. Sexual expressions were communicated through dance by the young people, casual flirtations between dancers between genders and amongst women; articulating this through physical proximity between them. Dance style varied amongst the Bengalis and there were many more that were more modest in their dancing style. In general there was a sense that ‘[b]eing desirable is more important than modesty in the mutual visual consumption of the disco’ (Farrer 2005: 487). There was more of a sense constancy of identities where ‘shifting’ of ‘everyday life’ was much less a requirement or expectation in these spaces. Searching for an ethnic identity was not necessarily an expression of ethnic purity, therefore the second generation were less likely to feel compelled to negotiate their identity and the contradictions that can arise.

This weaker association with an ‘ethnic purity’ helped develop the success and popularity of subsequent socials, so much so that people were turned away at subsequent events. The socials were divided between generically worded events to those emphasising Indian-Bengali-Hindu identity, both types were attended primarily by British Indian Hindu Bengalis. These socials reflected a yearning for an ethnic-regional community, an expression of belonging that was more their own than that of their parents. They did not, as a group, however, attempt to produce ‘culture shows’ independently of their first generation parents’ the ways that Maira’s (2002) second generation South Asians staged theirs. Notions of ethnicity did not appear to search for the ‘authenticity’ that Maira’s South Asians searched for.

Youth Forum ends

However, 2003 saw the last of the socials organised by the Youth Forum as a growing number of second generation members began to drift away. There were a couple more dramatic productions produced by the Youth Forum, but large scale second generation involvement stopped. The second generation started to become more involved in their

careers, got married and have children. The Youth Forum's emergence like its disbandment in 2006, appeared to coincide with their changing life course. This surge of interest was whittled down to a fraction of second generation involvement and interest. Tara and Ruma, two of the members who were heavily involved, explained why they were not involved with the Tagore Centre

Tara

I just don't have the time and energy, it was really fun, I did really enjoy it but you know how life just takes over. I have hardly enough time to catch up with Depak [her husband] let alone the Tagore Centre. I have made some really lovely friends from there, perhaps later I might do something . . . No, I don't think I would want to be involved in organising all that [socials] it was a lot of work and hassle.

Ruma

I do want to rejoin, but I am in the middle studying, I just can't think about anything else at the mo, I need to concentrate on that, after that I'll get involved.

However Ruma had a baby after completing her studies and did not return to the Youth Forum. The Youth Forum was disbanded in the meantime and would require her to join the main Tagore Centre, which she also did not. The fate of the Tagore Centre, like many of the Bengali organisations set up by the first generation, was losing the attention and interest of the second generation, they were either being sustained by an aging first generation and/or recent immigrant Indian Bengalis who had come into Britain, mainly medical or IT professionals, often without permanent citizenship.

There was a sense that second generation had a more fragile ethnic-regional identity. Although they sought out other Bengalis through the duration of the Youth Forum, there was very little momentum in sustaining it with increased pressures of work, marriage and children and without the support of the first generation. While many had a circle of Bengali friends, there was more of a disconnection with second generation Bengalis at large. Gans noted that 'symbolic ethnicity' based on the middle class third and fourth generation White Americans, was neither intense nor frequent, instead there was an expression of voluntary ethnicity that did not conflict with their largely assimilated lifestyle (1979: 8). Bhabha (1990) and Roosens (1989) in contrast to Gans (1969) argue

that cultural translation and symbolic ethnicity, respectively, require an ‘objective’ community which question, a process of ‘alienation and secondariness in approach to ethnic identity emerges from the ability of diasporic or postcolonial subjects to see their culture ‘from the outside’ (Roosens 1989: 151). Certainly the second generation who now weary of the heavily dictated (by the first generation) Youth Forum musical and theatrical performances. There was a definite questioning of first generation definitions of what constituted *good* “Bengali culture” and ethnic identity from the second generation, especially the culture that was orchestrated by first generation.

This rejection of Youth Forum performances perhaps illustrates that the second generation were not passive conduits for parent’s cultural projects, most were not adopting the Tagore “heritage” let alone manipulating these particular cultural symbols (although a very small group of second generation, particularly artists, film-makers, etc. were emerging with this material) the vast majority were rejecting it. The socials were perhaps the closest the second generation got to creating a more popular ‘third space’. There was little attempt to present an ‘authentic’ tradition, which was initially the allure of these events to the second generation. There were elements of ethnic yearning, but greater was the appeal of youth sub-culture, the appeal of partying, dancing, drinking, flirting, dating and meeting other young people. Importantly, in observing and speaking to second generation these socials were not in response to ‘conflicts’ and ‘contradictions’ that Clarke et al. (1976) suggests, but as Thornton suggests (2005: 185) ‘a means by which youth imagine their own and other social group, assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass’. Therein lies the contradiction of the second generation who, as a group, were searching for self-definition through ethnicity yet were unable to sustain it. Their *group* identification with ethnicity has become fragile, their activities in the ‘third space’ had become difficult to support.

Conclusion

There were several reasons that could be attributed to the failure of the Youth Forum. The first concentrated on the production of “cultural pursuits” through the various performances that was removed from what most second generation thought it meant “to be a British Indian Bengali”. Most second generation were less inclined to attend

Tagorian dramatic or musical performances, which although popular were attended predominantly by the first generation. The performances, whether musical or dramatics (particularly when in Bengali), were especially inaccessible with subtleties lost in translation. Secondly, as the second generation began to get married, the interest in the Youth Forum began to die down; this was amplified further with the birth of their children. As careers began to flourish with promotions to more senior roles within work, enthusiasm for the Youth Forum began to subside. The vigour of interest in the Youth Forum appeared to be linked strongly to a life course for the second generation. Even the socials that had been popular were losing their appeal to an older second generation, entering their thirties and forties; who were increasingly married and having children.

Initially a major draw for second generation attendance of Youth Forum was to 'reinforce cultural commonality' (Khandelwal 2002: 164) amongst the second generation Bengalis. Many who attended said that the appeal of the Youth Forum was its bridging of the disconnect they felt with other second generation Bengalis and a sense of "being Bengali". A 'third space' was not so much developed, but materialised for the second generation through the endeavours of the first. The second generation, amidst their complaints of not having a second generation space, made very little effort to create one, all the second generation that I had come across had only ever been part of second generation gathering when it was affiliated to a larger first generation organisation or it was small scale confined to second generation friends and often not necessarily all Bengali either. This emphasised the second generation's weaker sense of identification with their regional-language groups and lack meaningful connections to "Bengali culture".

The decreased number of marriages between Bengalis, increased levels of self-selecting marriages and first generation acceptance of these unions reflect a generation who are not 'betwixt and between'. Whilst second generation may have had intergenerational clashes they were not necessarily rooted in the East-West dichotomy, but as Gorer describes a "moral rejection of authority" (1963:53) which was also a dynamic shared by any parent-child relationship regardless of ethnicity⁸⁴. Family was an important

⁸⁴ Although Gorer writes about America.

context for shaping choices and behaviour (see Agarwal 1991; Rumbaut 1994), the first generation although creating a parallel social field for their offspring, particularly as children, this parallel cultural field did not have a strong ‘authentic’ *Bengali* identity expectations surrounding their children’s behaviour. Expectations and pressures lay in high educational expectations, “high cultured” pursuits, not limited to “Bengali culture” or “Indian culture”. Although the first generation parents expressed the fulfilling of their duty in regards to seeing their children settled in both “good” employment and marriage. Amongst both generations there was a great deal of acknowledgement of maintaining class based associations, which including appropriate Bengali-Indian ones, rather than maintaining “negative” ethnic ones, which were potentially seen as hindering the group’s social mobility.

The rearranging of the social system along class lines has been fundamental in the transformation of ‘traditional’ ideas of prestige and respectability. Even in overhauling this social system, there were expressions of longing to have a “sense of community” amongst the second generation “like other [South Asian] groups”. However, none of the participants had attempted to organise a Bengali second generation organisation or social independently of first generation influence, suggesting there were elements of rhetoric in their articulations.

However, initially several second generation went to meetings, participated and attended Tagore performances. Tagore, the quintessential personification of *Bengali* “high culture,” in the form, of art, dance, poetry and prose was often described in terms of little more than an emblematic symbol of their ethnicity/regional-language group, for many especially for the majority second generation who only attended socials. There was little interest amongst the majority to either engage with Tagore and his works either in its ‘original’ form or to ‘adapt’ it. The socials, however, proved to be well attended and liked amongst the group, being the most appealing and ‘relevant’ to the second generation. ‘Subculture invests in the weak points in the chain of socialization’ (P. Cohen 2005: 91) which for the Bengalis is the absence of a sense of “community” that drives the socialisation and aspires to fulfil, however they were not ‘forbidden’ or ‘restricted’ (Maira 2002) cultural fields (of nightclubs and restaurants).

This negotiating of these identities around “being modern”, involved a contradictory combination of distinguishing markers disassociating from “traditional South Asians” and “the working classes”; while at the same time attempting to carve out a middle class, British, Indian, Bengali, Hindu-secular identity. In this contradictory state there were less fixed notions of being Indian-Bengali and thus less engagement with internal paradoxes that are familiar to Maira’s South Asians where the second generation were torn between maintaining a rhetoric of ethnic authenticity while at the same time partaking in ‘polluting’ and ‘seductive’ mainstream American (British) culture (2002).

Bengalis rather than ‘switching’ to varying ‘ethnic styles’, were attempting to communicate “modern” ethnic features over “traditional” ones, through the signalling of their class status. Gibson’s (1988) second generation America Sikhs and indeed first generation Bengalis can be described as conforming to ‘White’ linguistic and interactional styles and also continuing to be grounded in a separate social sphere and cultural framework. However, second generation while expressing desires of cultural expression and a second generation ‘community’ space were unable to sustain this in larger group, beyond friendship groups. The second generation, while attending *Durga puja*, weddings and funerals, were less involved with the workings of a “Bengali culture”, instead they are intermittent grazers, Bengali organisation members being filled by recent professional Indian Bengali immigrants to Britain and only a small number of second generation being involved in organisations such as the Tagore Centre. The second generation were only brought together through the vigour of the Youth Forum which was primarily led by the first generation. Despite their interest in the second generation-led socials particularly, but also meetings and performances, these social contacts were unable to reinforce a group solidarity, to construct a broader sense of ‘fictive kinship’ beyond one’s social circle of second generation Bengali friends.⁸⁵ Although proud of their ancestry the second generation did not wish not to be defined by them alone. The second generation were searching for a respectability that signalled their middle class status, their education, their aspirations, “modern” marriage practices and their “modern” social practices especially with regard to women.

⁸⁵ Other vital elements of ‘fictive kinship’ that Fordham (1996: 71-77) describes as embodying ‘the moral judgement the group makes on its members (Brain 1972; Gates 1994; McCall 1994)’ it is sustained through ‘situations involving conflict or competition with White Americans’ (72); these aspects were absent.

Chapter 5

“Modern” Bengali Women

This chapter develops the themes of the previous chapter, of a greater sense of identification with a middle class respectability. Drawing upon the experiences of second generation British Indian Bengali women, this chapter explores the ways that these respondents negotiate their ethnicity whilst asserting a middle class “modern” respectability. Diasporic identities are, Dwyer (2000) argues, continuously ‘configured through gender’, and this chapter intends to demonstrate how these second generation women’s “modern” respectabilities relies on moving away from notions of *izzat*⁸⁶, dowry and marriage to alternative identifications of respectability that were bound also to class and educational identifications. Finally, this chapter considers the negotiations and consequences of the newer conceptualisation of this “modern” respectability.

One of the most significant discussions around ethnic and national discourses is the central importance of women as ‘bearers of the collective’ (Yuval-Davis 1980). These arguments have developed in response to the gender-blind theorisations of nationalism ‘which was being attributed to intellectuals (Gellner 1983; Smith 1986) and/or state bureaucrats (Amin 1978; Zubaida 1989)’ (Yuval-Davis 2003: 9). Mosse (1985), Enloe (1989), Chatterjee (1990) and Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989; 1992) have elaborated on a range of embodied practices, in an attempt to define various imagined communities emphasising the modesty and chastity of women:

[It is] because they see women as the community’s or the nation’s most valuable *possessions*; the principal *vehicles* for transmitting the whole nation’s values from one generation to the next; *bearers* of the community’s future generation – crudely, nationalist wombs; the members of the community most *vulnerable* to defilement and exploitation by oppressive rulers; and most susceptible to *assimilation* and cooption by insidious outsiders. (Enloe 1989: 54)

The centrality of sexuality and gender to the construction of imagined communities has been mirrored in South Asian diasporic literature. South Asian women are described in varying levels of adherence to ‘conservative’ and ‘traditional’ behaviours. There is an

⁸⁶ Izzat refers to the honour or reputation of a person.

expectations to maintain *izzat* (family honour) through the preservation of their modesty, appropriate behaviour, clothes, hair covering, and marrying appropriately through an arranged marriage (see the examples of Mand 2008; Maira 2002; Dwyer C. 2000; Bradby 1999; Jhutti 1998; Gillespie 1995). These accounts describe the high levels of regulation over women's bodies, where there is self-surveillance and surveillance by others. Mosse (1985: 16ff) argues how the concept of 'respectability' is bound to men's legitimate control of women. Women were 'idealized as the guardian[s] of morality and of public and private order'. Mosse further claims that women were assigned the roles of 'guardian[s], protector[s] and mother[s]' which required women to be 'passive rather than active . . . embodiment[s] of its respectability'. Cockburn notes that the 'more regressive the rendering of national community, the more does nation involve reproduction familial imagery (birth, blood, sons) and the more profoundly is gender differentiated and essentialized, man as warrior, woman as nurturer' (1998: 42). However, Cockburn does not elaborate on conditions which may be less 'regressive' or even 'progressive'. This chapter intends to make a case that while women may very well remain at the centre of 'community' it was not necessarily driven by a 'conservative' project but through the reproduction of class and "being modern".

Second generation British Indian Bengali women challenged these gendered expectations of being 'guardians of cultural and religious integrity' (Dwyer C. 2000: 477). They made attempts to disentangle and distance themselves from the assertion that their chastity reproduces boundaries of their ethnic group. Instead, second generation Bengali women were in pursuit of "being modern" but, *not* conforming to be 'modern-yet-modest' (Najmabadi 1991: 49), where the preoccupation with women's "appropriate" sexual behaviour remained. Second generation Bengali women were distancing stereotypical assumptions made about South Asian women through the popular press and 'others' (including 'indigenous British perspective' (Werbner 2004: 899)), asserting themselves as hyper-'modern'. Werbner is mindful of how 'inter-generational differences or cultural disparities' are reported (2005: 31) in the press especially in terms of South Asian women as victims, suffering violence, patriarchal domination and forced marriages.

Instead, second generation women facilitated a newer ‘language of identity’ (Kandiyoti 1991)⁸⁷, where they articulated and displayed their disassociation with negative “traditional” South Asian markers. This developed as part of a middle class ‘respectability’. This respectability was sought through education, “independence”, freedom of movement and a professional working life which allowed them financial independence to purchase their own properties, holidays, cars, etc. These were identified as desirable characteristics and aspirations for second generation women. Social practices such as dowry, honour and “arranged marriages”⁸⁸ were increasingly rejected as “conservative” markers by the second generation and significantly their parents were in collusion with them to present such a construct.

However, with these new characteristics of “freedom” and “independence” have come some unexpected consequences such as the significant increase in the average age of marriage for women and a high number of single women in their thirties and soon their forties. This chapter intends to examine to how second generation Bengali women distance themselves from ‘traditional’ markers and instead assert ‘modern’ markers such as education, professional employment, independent living, dating, postponement of marriage and a ‘modern’ community. This chapter also intends to identify the inconsistencies, both intended and unexpected consequences of “being modern”

Ghar and izzat

Women are believed to be the repositories of the family *izzat*, (*lajja*)⁸⁹, reputation, and of the family’s status, in the community (Gibson 1988; Wakil, Siddique, and Wakil 1981) which could be described as one’s *ghar* (household/ dwelling) status. In her work on young Punjabi women, Bradby (1999) draws on the works of Campbell (1964) and Lison-Tolosana (1966) when describing the ‘strong sanctions against non-conformity that operate in terms of the reputation of the woman’s family’ (1999). This observation was mirrored in Chatterjee’s analysis of Indian nationalism and womanhood. Chatterjee equated ‘tradition’ with ‘spiritual essence’ that elevated India above ‘the West’; where the spiritual East stood in resistance to the ‘material’ advancement of ‘the

⁸⁷ Which brings with it unanticipated consequences to women’s marriage patterns and behaviour, discussed later in this chapter.

⁸⁸ See chapter 5: *Love and Modernity* and chapter 6: *Endogamy, Homogamy and Modernity*.

⁸⁹ *Lajja* translates as shame in Bengali.

West's' 'science, technology, and economic organisation' (1989: 623). This was then reproduced and reconstructed in the form of 'the home and the world (*ghar* and *bahir*⁹⁰)' (1989); out of which emerged a Bengali middle class 'project' of cultural preservation through women, who were to be represented through 'notions of spirituality and of womanhood' (1989). Sexual behaviour linked to preservation of "traditions" and "culture" amongst South Asians who travelled to Britain (and the United States of America) have been well documented particularly in studies of the second generation (see: Maira 2002; Jhutti 1998; Prinja 1999; Gavron 1997; Dasgupta and Dasgupta 1996; and Gillespie 1995). Dasgupta and Dasgupta observed that the 'cultural schooling' of the second generation, manifested in the preservation of gender roles, 'the 'chastity' and 'purity' of community daughters' (1996: 386); in 'unequal parental restrictions of the autonomous dating behaviour of daughters, and the increased vigilance against the exogamy of girls' (1996: 386). This is also reflected in Gillespie's (1995) study of second generation British Punjabis in London, where a woman's chastity at the time of marriage functioned to seal the status of a woman, and thus by association her family's status within the community.

However, this was not automatically experienced by all South Asian "communities" in Britain (Ahmad et al 2003). Maira (2002) challenges Chatterjee's assertions, drawing on Jayawardena and de Alwis (1996: xvii), and De Groot (1998: 145) that masculinity is 'implicitly at stake in the gendering of nation or community as woman' and that 'within a patriarchal framework of recovering or surrendering the honor of women that constricts signs of "virility" or "loss of manliness"' (2002: 181). Maira also notes that the concept of *izzat* is 'not etched in stone but are variously interpreted and contested', particularly she argues in the 'diasporic context or in a time of social or economic transition, gender ideologies previously taken for granted can be reconsidered, denaturalized, and recreated' (2002: 160). Maira warns, however, that reduced notions of *izzat* cannot be assumed to have been mitigated simply because women gain education and employment outside of the home (Maira 2002: 160). In the case of the Bengalis *izzat* has been reconsidered. While social control of female sexuality can come into conflict with class mobility; this does not take into account the nuances of the first generation Bengalis themselves who can also be in a process of constructing

⁹⁰ Bahir translates as outside.

meaning and developing practices in response to their positions within the life course (Gardner 2002). First generation Bengalis were not pre-occupied with their daughter's chastity. Parents' "modern" attitudes and the *absence* of focus of their daughter's sexual behaviour was used by them to hold up a cultural superiority above other South Asians. However, there were class-coded expectations placed on both second generation genders to be highly educated and to enter professional employment status.

The emphasis on education and professional employment of second generation women by the first generation, did not equate to an absence of concern about pre-marital sexual behaviour of women. There was clearly more tolerance of male dating than female (see Maira 2002; Agarwal 1991; Gibson 1988; Mani 1993) *but* the possibility of having a "friend" or friends of the opposite sex was able to diffuse the construction of more conservative standards for girls around dating. Second generation women, therefore, hid their sexual behaviour from their parents and other Bengalis (especially from the first generation, but sometimes also other second generation, although there was often a mutual unspoken code of protective silence amongst second generation). Engaging in sexual practices for second generation women prior to marriage was considered undesirable by the first generation. Sex, if engaged with, is kept private or amongst one's close peers. Because of the sensitivity of the subject matter, pre-marital sex is a difficult area to broach directly, but several second generation confided that they were either living with their partner or had a sexual relationship with their partner. A third of married second generation women in my sample admitted or made inferences to having pre-marital sex, either with their marital partner or with another partner prior to marriage. Modesty norms amongst the second generation women were clearly less regulated from the experiences of first generation mothers where their sexual behaviour was more carefully monitored.

There was often a "don't ask and don't tell" strategy employed regarding sexual relations and cohabitation (usually reserved for dating (see Maira 2002)). Many parents did not enquire about the "virtue" of their own daughters and were often careful not to direct such questions towards other people's daughters either, in fear of their own daughter coming under such scrutiny. However, this did not preclude gossip about possible indiscretions.

Lila, a second generation woman in her mid-twenties remarked that she was free to go out if she wished. She was also free to date whom she wished although she did not tend to discuss her dates with her parents; but also they did not make prohibiting remarks about dating.

Lila

My Mum and Dad, don't really set curfews or anything like that, why would they? I would love to see them try [*she laughs*]. They just complain, they just say, "Why are you going out all the time?" kind of thing, not, "We forbid you to go out". It doesn't really work like that. I am a grown woman, I am not a teenager, I am a free agent. I have lived on my own, I am waiting for my contract to come through on my flat, they are not going to be keeping tags on me when I move out, they haven't done that when I moved out of home when I was younger to go to university, I don't think that they will start now. I know that they worry about me, my mum used to wait up for me when I was going out, now she goes to bed, she has got used to it, but I know that both of them worry about me, but I have told them to not stay up and they don't anymore.

If I am going out with someone [i.e. on a date], it is really just something I do, I don't publicise it, I just do it. They ask me where I am going, who I am going with, you know keeping it light, not an interrogation or anything, so it makes it easy to tell them the truth, although if I am meeting with one guy a lot, I might just say a few of us are going you know, make it less of a big deal. If I am serious about someone, well then that is different, I do tell them, I have got nothing to hide.

. . . A sexual relationship? Well that is something I would definitely not discuss with my parents. I don't think they need to know the finer points of my sex-life. They would not want to know I am pretty sure of that. I would like them not to know about it, it would be pushing them into something that would be too much, I don't think they need it pushed in their face. I had a friend who did that, told her parents that they were living with their boyfriend, and they found it difficult, obviously, but she wanted to tell them the truth about her life, which is good on one level, but to be honest I think, sometimes it is nice to allow parents the illusion of a successful daughter who is a professional woman, who can be independent but also discreet, I don't want to have to make my parents explain to their friends that I am living with someone and also I don't want to face the pressure of you should only live with someone if you are married type of thing. We just don't talk about going out with people really, might of joked about it but not a heart to heart or anything like that.

Like Lila, many women expressed similar sentiments about the freedom of movement and dating. Although parents may nag their daughters about going out, there was an absence of curfews placed on young women, enabling a system of young women dating freely. For second generation women, the possibility of parents joking about dating is perhaps indicative of possibility that dating could be an option for them. Maira (2002: 156) makes this point about South Asian men in the United States, who are able to engage in banter with parents (something that their sisters are unable to do) which allows for the possibility of dating, although a sexual relationship is not spoken of. Dating and a sexual relationship were not necessarily fused into a single entity; they were not discussed in those terms. A dating relationship is often discussed in a non-sexualised way. Women could often assert the platonic, this was reflected in the way that the first generation spoke of dating amongst second generation. I asked Lila's mother, Ruma (with Lila's agreement) to discuss second generation dating generally:

Ruma

Dating is what young people do nowadays. It was different when I was younger, you didn't do that kind of thing, only the Christian families did that, Hindu girls really stayed at home in India, until their parents fixed someone for them . . . There were a few [Hindus] who did start a love affair with someone at college or something like that, but that was not seen as good in those days, I am talking about the 60s and 70s. It was seen as being something you should not do. But there were love marriages like that. Now everyone is having a love marriage amongst our children. Lots of our [Bengali] girls and boys are finding someone at university and then getting married. It is good. It is good if Lila finds someone . . . If she found someone at university that would have been good, if he was a Indian boy, there are a lot of Bengalis girls who found a nice Indian boy at college.

This partitioning of dating from the sexual element of a relationship is maintained and reinforced by the second generation, especially in regards to their own dating partner and that of their friends'. Therefore, friendships and dating were not stigmatised. This acceptance of friendships with boys and men allowed a route of introducing boyfriends as friends and an avoidance of causing parents to become affronted by a particular relationship. As a result many young Bengali women are able to juggle a friendship-boyfriend relationship presented as a friendship in front of their parents. In these "friendship" pairings, in the presence of first generation parents, the relationship was

friendly and caring but physically restrained, as is customary even amongst married couples. Sonia, a second generation woman had been going out with Alpesh, her second generation British Indian Gujarati boyfriend, for over four years. Sonia had maintained this “friendship” with Alpesh in amongst her other male platonic friendships.

Sonia

It comes very naturally, I sort of fell into it [maintaining a “friendship”]. Well it was easier I guess with Alpesh because he is Indian and he knows the protocol . . . I didn’t really introduce anyone else really, they were quite short term relationships and being at university I kind of just got on with it. . . . with Alpesh it was different he really meant something to me. . . . I think that we all do it [“friendship” maintenance] really; we kind of just play a role for our parents. Some Asians girls can’t even introduce their boyfriends in any form; they have to lead this double life. . . . Well it isn’t quite the same for us because we can get the ball rolling, you know if you want to get married to your boyfriend, your parents already know them, it is not a total shock. You can get them to know and like them. And to be honest I think that mums’ know. Although people do tell their parents, but usually before they get married, when they are certain that this is the one.

The consequences of being “found out” are again dependent on the family dynamics, but if parents are unhappy, the second generation woman can be “nagged,” about her relationship, with comments such as “speaking too much on the phone” or “going out too much”. However being “forbidden” to see a “friend” or a threat of ‘honour’ of the family being ruined was absent in my discussions with second generation women. Objections were more about the *individual* than the *process* of self-selecting a boyfriend and so did not manifest in terms of *izzat* (See Chapter 6: *Love and “Modern” Respectability*).

Second generation women’s activities, after they entered higher education, including their sexual behaviour, were not closely “monitored” (see examples of monitoring: Jayawardena and de Alwis 1996; Ortner 1974). Living away from home was highly desirable amongst my second generation Bengali women, conjoined with parental wishes for their daughters to enter university. This meant that many second generation women moved out, even those who chose London universities, would often spend at least the first year away from home. Through the context of education, second

generation women were able, to ‘rework’ tradition (Mani cited in Bhattacharjee 1992: 30) finding spaces to have boyfriends, girlfriends and sexually experiment whilst at university. This highly valued education averted the gaze and emphasis away from women’s sexuality to her education status. The avoidance of possible ‘inappropriate relationships’ in the public arena of schools and colleges, as Gavron describes (1997: 102), was unfamiliar for the Bengalis; and as Ahmad et al. (2003) argues this was partly connected to the ethnic and class identity of Gavron’s respondents, and not necessarily the experience of all South Asian women in Britain.

“Lessening” of *izzat*, however, was not without its double standards governing sexual behaviour. Bengali men were more able to be open about their relationships with women and increasingly able to tell parents and the wider Bengali community about “living with someone”, which was met with surprising little furore. Relatively few Bengali women were able to do the same. There were only two examples of women able to live with their unmarried partners openly, both were atypical, in that one was the offspring of a family breakdown and another was where the woman’s father was Bengali and her mother was white English. Neither parents nor offspring were shunned; notably however, no other second generation women respondents lived openly with their partners.

There was also less emphasis on female sexual purity, although Bengali parents make the assumption that *their* daughters, in particular, have acted with sexual restraint, there was no specific strategy employed to control female sexuality. Parents relied on their children either being “sensible” or “discreet” about their relationships. Indeed, the Bengali community were becoming accustomed to long term relationships, “friends” and increasingly self-selecting marriages (see Chapter 6: *Love and “Modern” Respectability*). Increased numbers of self-selecting marriages with non-Bengali partners (see Chapter 7, Marriage Selection) made the concept of *izzat* all the more remote. *Izzat* was therefore constructed by the Bengalis through a process of ‘othering’, where they dissociated from it and attributing it to “traditional” South Asians and Muslims (who were often by default considered as homogenously “traditional”). This distinguishing was a strategy employed in front of anyone from colleagues to “White friends” or even to other Indians or Bengalis to assert their “being modern”.

British Indian Bengalis have used markers of “progressive,” “modern,” “open mindedness,” “middle class” and “liberal” values in relation to women, to describe their inclusion with the ‘rest of society’ while juxtaposing the ‘other’ as “traditional” South Asians and Muslim communities who were considered “insular”, “narrow-minded” and “limited” in their conceptualisation of education, women and British society. Second generation Bengali women therefore, did not ascribe *their* respectability to the domestic domain; their respectability was found through the reproduction of middle class ideas about higher education, professional occupations and cultural capital.

Women, education and employment

There are high levels of employment amongst both generation of Bengali women, 86 per cent of first generation and 97 per cent of second generation women worked⁹¹). Women’s employment therefore was a prominent aspect amongst these Bengali women’s lives.

Setting the scene: The first generation

Many of the first generation women, soon after arriving in the 1960s and 1970s entered education, training or employment; the majority of whom had never worked outside the domestic context before their migration to Britain. All the first generation women had finished school education in India, 32 per cent had further education from India. Of my 22 first generation respondents, only 3 women (14 per cent) had not worked and had never entered paid employment. Women’s employment was highly variable to begin with, a few entered professional vocations, especially as doctors (9 per cent), while most others worked in white collar professions while a few entered blue collar work initially. First generation Bengali women often explained how before marriage they had not expected to work, as was common amongst middle class women in Bengal and in India generally (Donner 1999; 2002; and Caplan 1985). However, working in the public context was considered essential towards a particular standard of living (Mui-Teng Quek and Knudson-Martin 2006 and Mand 2003). Married women, arriving in Britain, were also attempting to help their husbands who were either students or early careerists, so money was usually limited. (The few Bengali women in my sample who arrived as

⁹¹ The one woman who (represents the 3 per cent) was not working as she had come into a considerable income from parental business and had stopped paid employment, although she had been previously employed in a prestigious financial institution.

single women (14 per cent) arrived with their brother and also worked or studied.) Work, education, training when they first arrived was often spoken of as a way to combat isolation and loneliness that many first generation women felt on arrival to Britain.

Ahmad et al.'s (2003) findings in the 1991 census findings reflected the relatively high level of full time employment amongst Indian women who were 8 per cent more likely to be in full time employment than their White counterparts; and more likely to be in professional positions compared to White women. Female employment was recognised as a good way to achieve upward mobility of the family. Educational success for men and increasingly for women was seen as a 'necessary precursor to any kind of upward mobility, for without the necessary skills and qualifications there was absolutely no chance whatsoever of challenging those exclusionary tendencies' (Ballard 2000: 19). While all first generation women had attended English or Bengali mediums schools in India, this did not always correspond to the level of work entered into. Many had to obtain British qualifications, education and/or training to attain white collar work, although some were able to enter white collar work immediately if they were confident enough to use their English gained through English mediums. Many professional women, especially medics, attended post-graduate courses to enable them to work in Britain as professionals.

First generation women working outside the home, including professionals, achieved significantly within the mainstream white collar sector. They were fortunate not to experience some of the difficulties described by Khandelwal's first generation who were unable to find work within mainstream settings, instead working in 'immigrant-run ethnic niches and underground employment' (2002: 129). Many first generation women expressed how having worked within Britain had been a positive experience: earning of their own income had been an empowering process and gave them more influence and power within their relationship within their household. An experience captured amongst Khandelwal's *professional* women (2002)

In most households, sharing in the provision of household income did not produce an equivalent sharing of the house workload, and women continue to hold primary responsibility. In some households in which both spouses were employed, men supported

a reallocation of labor in the home. They helped with washing dishes or chopping vegetables, and occasionally even demonstrated their culinary talents, particularly for guests. (Khandelwal 2002: 133)

Although the experience of my first generation varied in the sense that they followed different occupations and different employment courses; many of these women were actively setting their own agendas in terms of their careers. Of all the women in this study that had worked, they all eventually ended up in white collar work.

Second generation women, their education and employment

Education was seen by the first generation as a way for their second generation daughters to embark on a career of their own, to have a profession that could support them not only before marriage, but to equip them during a marriage, to allow independence, enable them to buy a home and maintain a lifestyle and procure a “good husband” (which could not be completely discounted). Jeffrey and Jeffrey (1994) posed the case that education was a way to strengthen or restructure women’s position through ‘domesticating women into new forms of patriarchy rather than offering them a new horizon’ (1994: 157). This suggests that ‘modern’ women were ‘reduced to mere objects . . . at the service of a political discourse conducted by men and for men’ (Schick 1990: 369).

For the second generation in particular women’s education was strongly linked to employment, not simply in trying to secure a “good husband”. This recognition of education has, Ahmad et al., argued moved away from ‘patriarchal ideologies of women as homemakers’ (2003: 14), which Bengalis used to distinguish themselves from other “traditional” South Asians. Education linked to employment for second generation women increased the association and relevance of studies as conducted by Raley et al. that associates higher education with the increased likelihood of a wife being an ‘equal’ or primary provider and certainly being a part of a dual-income couple (Raley et al 2006: 22).⁹² Therefore, women were not expected to give up their careers after marriage or even after having children by their parents, siblings, husbands, other Bengalis women or the “Bengali community”. Having seen a great proportion of their

⁹² Although Raley et al express a major restricting factor in a wife’s supply of labour and income is with the arrival of children. (Raley et al 2006).

mothers work, the second generation followed suit. Of the 10 second generation women in my study who had children, 8 of them returned to work within 18 months of having children⁹³ returning to their career ambitions and very successful careers, suggesting marital “equality”.

However, beyond the second generations’ general interest in marital equality (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 2005) between a couple, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney argue that there was little agreement as to what constituted ‘appropriate gender behavior except for a general desire for equality between partners (Keith & Schafer, 1991; Scanzoni, 1982; Stelmack, 1994; Walsh, 1989)’ (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 1998: 81). Knudson-Martin and Mahoney argue that social context can support or inhibit the development of marital equality, factors attributed to equality are strong (1998: 82), and they defined four features that characterised an equal relationship:

Partners hold equal status; accommodation in the relationship is mutual; attention to the other in the relationship is mutual; and there is mutual well-being of partners. In our definition of an equal marriage, each spouse has roughly the same capacity to get the other to cooperate in order to allow the attainment of his/her goals, and both persons attend to and accommodate the other. (1998: 82)

Beyond using the ‘language of equality’ (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 1998) the second generation of women sought out relationships where there was similar educational status between the couple (see chapter 7, *Marriage Selection*) and a career which Mui-Teng Quek and Knudson-Martin (2006) suggests as a valuing of self-development, which in turn links career with equality in marriage. Sexton and Perlman (1989) claim that ‘a person with a high career self-direction may be more likely to desire and adopt an equal marital relationship. This extends to husbands’ support of wives’ desire for career advancement through higher education’ (Mui-Teng Quek and Knudson-Martin 2006: 63). This is a common occurrence amongst second generation women and their husbands, where they support each other in their career development opportunities and further education. Devi had embarked on her vocational PhD and she was required to work away from home once a week, she would sometimes come home late at night. Rabin, her husband, would often prepare their dinner, support her

⁹³ Although many have been able to negotiate work-life agreements

emotionally and practically at home so she could concentrate on her studies over the years. Likewise Devi had also supported Rabin when he was trying to establish his footing in his new career earlier in their marriage. Mui-Teng Quek and Knudson-Martin observed that ‘mutual patterns of accommodation suggest interdependence and an empowerment by each other as they organize their relationship around collectivistic norms’ (2006: 66).

Equality is furthered through the idea of marrying one’s peer, (as argued in Chapter 7, *Marriage Selection*). Therefore couples organise themselves much more in terms of ‘partners’, rather than through gendered roles as has been acknowledged in other findings (see: Mui-Teng Quek and Knudson-Martin 2006; Risman 1998; Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 2005). Women’s commitment to their careers was a crucial characteristic that challenged “traditional” ways of ‘doing gender’ and a mutual sharing. Mui-Teng Quek and Knudson-Martin (2006) add that equality emerges for ‘pragmatic reasons’. For Bengalis, like Mui-Teng Quek’s and Knudson-Martin’s (2006) Singaporeans, the enhancement of the ‘dual career’ relationship included aspects of both a ‘collectivist culture’ (such as “doing family” and “marrying one’s equal” and a “we-consciousness”) and an ‘individualistic culture’ which together can work towards equality within relationships. Thus Bengali women’s education and their need to be educated was met with approval, but this did not mitigate from the ‘map of living’ (Khandelwal 2002: 118). Bengali women were still expected to complete their higher education studies, enter high level professions, get married in their twenties and then bear children; all the while maintaining their social positions within the middle classes.

Roulet (1996) argues that dowry has the capacity to reflect higher education and employment. Maintenance of dowry, Biao (2005) contends, is not contradictory to having higher education, illustrated through the examples Indian IT professionals in Sydney, Australia and Andhra Pradesh and India; in fact, higher education and professional occupations were increasing the levels of dowry. However, associations with *izzat* (Roulet 1996), “tradition” and “backward practices” has made dowry an unattractive social practice for Bengalis of both generations, particularly the second. Dowry rather than defining social status to the second generation, was regarded as antiquated, “patriarchal” and “irrelevant” to their lives, distinguishing themselves from other British South Asians who have retained this marriage practice.

Dowry

Menski describes “dowry” as what a woman brings into a marriage, which can include money, material objects, the prospect of financial gain through her profession, or even the cost of the wedding celebrations (1998:16). Dowry (*pon*) is a transfer of wealth by parents to their daughters at the time of her marriage and prevalent in South Asia (Rao 1993; Anderson 2003). Srinivas (1984) states that the dowry system originated amongst the high castes in North India, this involved the giving of their daughter, the *dān* (the gift of a virgin) together with a dowry to the groom’s family. Goody and Tambiah (1973) argue that as a daughter does not traditionally receive a share in her parent’s wealth, a dowry system exists so that she is able to share, otherwise she will be completely excluded from their wealth. Goody (1973: 1) claims that dowry is a *pre-mortem* inheritance given to women when she gets married and is not intended to be a monetary transaction whereby a father becomes a “seller” for his daughter’s wedding (Paul 1985:3).

During the period of British colonialism in India, marriages with dowries became the only legally accepted form of marriage among all social groups and castes (Caplan 1993).⁹⁴ Dowry in the form of cash and valuable goods was given to the groom and his family (Karanth 1996: 102), to the bride and the couples as a unit (Fruzzetti 1982: 30). During the latter half of the twentieth century dowry became a fundamental component of weddings regardless of geography, caste and whether rural or urban (102). Regardless of the introduction of the *Dowry Prohibition Act*, 1961 which saw the criminalising of the giving of a dowry, dowries remained prevalent in India (Srinivas 1978: 26). Menski (1998) and Caplan (1993: 361) argue that anti-dowry legislation did not include *stridhana*, which was described as commodities such as clothes and jewellery that the bride receives from her own family, which represents her *pre-mortem* inheritance from them.

Srinivas traces the convention of the ‘modern dowry’ to the Brahmins who through the development of ‘Westernisation’ embraced consumerist traits (1984: 22) which was then integrated into dowry. Srinivas observes that ‘modern dowry’ is a substantial

⁹⁴ Samuel notes that although dowry’s origins are based in Hindu ideologies that dowry has permeated other religious groups such as the Muslims and Christians in India (2002:202-203).

amount of money “demanded directly or indirectly by the groom’s kin” (1984: 11-12), involving an excessive “degree of monetization” (10). Within the armoury of ‘modern dowry’ Samuel also includes overtone of violence (2002: 199). Respondents of both generations were very vocal about their dissociation with dowry, often describing it in terms of a “*traditional* Indian culture” or what *other* South Asian groups did. Instead British Indian Bengalis emphasised the value of symbolic wealth (Bourdieu 1994) over economic wealth.

Additionally dowry was accompanied with negative and embarrassing features such as dowry harassment and violence, associated with the ‘modern dowry’. Dowry was explained by informants as a way to share out inheritance in the past; however they clarified that their “modern” sensibilities and their giving of post-mortem inheritance to both genders was a reason as to why dowries no longer needed to exist. If a dowry was mentioned it was spoken of in terms of what kin in India might have had to give or what *other* British South Asian communities might engage in. For British Indian Bengalis the giving or receiving of dowry was not seen as a matter of prestige, nor was the correlation of status achieved by ‘the size of dowry’ securing ‘the prestige and honor of the line accepting the gift of the virgin’ (Fruzzetti 1982: 31).

Certainly Bhachu (1985) acknowledges how dowries have undergone change in Britain through women’s entrance into the labour market, whereby they are involved in the creation of their dowries (Mand 2003; Jhutti 1998 and Bhachu 1985). These modifications of dowry practices have not become evident in the imagination of or within marriages practices for the Bengalis. This aversion to dowry was consistent with the general “modern” strategies and sensibilities projected by Bengalis of both generations, especially the second and even more so by women.

Dowries in decline

The weakening and disappearance of dowries was not extensively documented, consequently it was challenging to prove or disprove the claim that dowry was losing its appeal and relevance. Nazzarri (1991) however details how dowry declined in nineteenth-century Brazil with the development of capitalism. While admittedly dowry is a practice that often goes on “behind the scenes” for South Asians, a “true” picture of

what was happening would be impossible to ascertain. Yet what cannot be denied was that dowry did not hold the same *influence* for diasporic South Asians as it does for Indians in India (Prinja 1999: 40). One of the main reasons argued for the maintenance of dowry was the maintenance of caste endogamy, which was losing its significance amongst my informants.

Breakdown of caste-endogamy

Fruzzetti and Caplan make a case that hierarchy and caste status are central factors in dowry negotiations (Fruzzetti 1982: 33; Caplan 1984: 293), a means of 'preserving endogamous boundaries in a heterogeneous setting' (Caplan 1984: 293), thus a breakdown of caste-endogamy creates a decline in dowry (Anderson 2003: 288). Anderson argues that caste and modernisation has implications for dowry inflation/deflation and ultimately the disintegration of dowry. Anderson remarks how in the early industrial period in Europe, wealth preceded inherited standing as the main determinant of social class (2003: 292)⁹⁵. Both Lambiri-Dimaki (1985) and Nazzari (1991) however have made a link with the decline in dowry with 'a new social ethos which placed greater value upon individual achievement than upon inherited status' (1985:177) and the transformation of a hierarchical clan-based society into a more individualistic one divided into classes based on wealth, not birth (1991). In comparison, in India there was a relatively high level of caste-endogamy amongst the middle class, where they were reproducing class as well as caste (see Fuller and Narasimhan 2007; De Neve 2007; Béteille 1996: 162-163; Vatuk 1972).

Increase in value of women in the marriage market and inheritance rights for women

Anderson (2003) argues that when women have value in the marriage market, whereby a husband is a beneficiary of a wife's economic value then this acts as a dowry payment alternative (2003: 288-289); forming a part of their inheritance as Goody (2000) suggests. Bengali second generation women certainly would be considered to bring high economic value to a marriage, whereby 89 per cent of all second generation women went to university, of the 11 per cent who did not enter university, all were over 35, born in the 1960s, coming to Britain as young children in 1960s and 1970s. 100 per cent of all of my female respondents under 35 went to university (28 women). All

⁹⁵ Anderson contrasts how modernization in India alone did not dampen the strength and influence of caste's 'central role in determining status' (2003: 292).

women bar one (because of disability) worked, regardless of whether they were university graduates, married, unmarried or had children. No second generation women worked in blue collar professions. The high monetary value of women in the marriage market and their net worth were clear, but whether the educating of daughters had the aim of lowering dowries was more doubtful for the Bengalis. The educational investment in a daughter for Bengalis was seen to enable daughters to be self-sustaining, whether they were single, married, widowed or divorced, moving away from caste into a wealth based society.

The first generation spoke of sharing property and wealth equally amongst their offspring, regardless of gender. Inheritance was not seen as the sole right of a son; wealth was commonly divided equally amongst offspring as a *post-mortem* inheritance. As early as 1969, Hooja (1969: 222) claimed that if inheritance rights for daughters were introduced in India, men would no longer marry girls with the most dowry but those with the most property. However, Hooja's prediction has produced a less cynical outcome for the Bengalis. In Britain, where inheritance for Bengali second generation was a reality; accompanied by a steady decline in parental involvement in marriages, the criteria for marriage has tended to focus more (as chapter 7, *Marriage Selection* suggests) on educational parity rather than future inheritance or dowry. Asking for a dowry, if one was so inclined, would be redundant if a daughter was to receive an equal share of post-mortem inheritance from her parents.

Wealth based society

Within a wealth-based society, Anderson (2003) correlates the economic value of brides with wealthy fathers who were matched with high income grooms; acting as a substitute for dowry payments. In contrast to a caste-based society, Anderson argues, that where there are increases in average wealth, the demand for dowry will also increase. For the second generation, generally high income Bengali women who live very much within a 'wealth based society' where they are financially independent from their parents (not just their fathers'); these women often marry equally high income grooms. As often these women are not marrying partners within caste or even region, the breakdown of dowry is an inevitable result. The growing emphasis on a social class system has seen potential spouses match more according to education and income rather than inherited statuses such as caste (Anderson 2003).

Increase in self-selecting marriages

Jhutti reflects that ‘dowry problem’ will only cease when ‘arranged marriages within one’s caste and religion stop’ (1998: 294-295). The increase in self-selecting marriages has facilitated the decrease in associations with dowry, especially when they were with non-South Asians, but also with other South Asians. Self-selecting marriages have worked to weaken the importance of caste and thus dowry. Even in “arranged marriages” where caste-endogamy exists, the fact that (most often British Indian Bengali grooms and their families) refuse to take dowry, making a point of not asking, reiterating that dowry was not required as the bride-to-be was “more than enough”.

Botticini and Siow (2003) also consider how dowry payments will disappear and be reduced where married sons no longer live with their parents, which is reflected amongst the second generation Bengali men where 90 per cent lived away from home after marriage. This was also reflected in 93 per cent of grooms whom Bengali women married, regardless of whether a marriage was self-selecting or not; although a self-selecting marriage was a good predictor of a higher likelihood of a man living outside of parental home or at least setting up home independently on marriage, which was desirable, if not essential for second generation women.

The influence of “being modern”

Like the Hindu Gujaratis in London whom Prinja (1999: 40ftn) studied, dowry amongst second generation of Bengalis holds little direct impact. Criteria of partners were decided upon independently of dowry considerations. The influence of “being modern” as an ideology was of itself powerful over how dowry was constructed for Bengalis. The absence of dowry was regarded as a part of a middle class financial affluence, where dowry was not required by the families, nor needed to sustain a financially secure family.

Bengalis did give gifts to their daughters at the time of her marriage, but these were rarely understood as *pre-mortem* inheritance (there was only one case amongst my second generation informants that I knew of). Gifts to the couple were understood as a wedding gift(s) from parents, which might include money or gifts from a wedding list

that the couple made through a department store.⁹⁶ Gifts to the son-in-law in forms of outfits or watches were also given to the groom. Wedding gifts were not understood in terms of a *requirement* of marriage, particularly in terms of a ‘modern dowry’, the presenting and exchanging of gifts were extended to other South Asians as well as to non-South Asian in-laws (especially to mother-in-laws who may be given gifts of saris to wear at the wedding for instance). Wedding reception expenses were often shared or separated to cater for both sets of families’ guests of the bride and groom, especially where the marriage was between self-selecting couples.

There was not a single factor that propelled the second generation away from dowry and indeed much of the first generation professed their aversion to dowry. For Bengalis dowry was constructed as something distant from their marital practices, something which first generation’s parents in India may have believed in, but not something that could or they wished to administer in Britain. As with “arranged marriage”, dowry was recognised in terms of being “antiquated”, but unlike marriages that are arranged by parents, dowries were not reconstructed and modified to make “gifts” appear more acceptable. There was a concerted effort by Bengalis to distance themselves from this dowry, fuelled by the negative connotations in Britain which consider such practices as “patriarchal” and “unenlightened”. The press had printed high profile stories about dowry harassment and dowry violence inflicted on brides, which as in the cases of “arranged marriages”/ “forced marriages” created a negative association with dowry for the British press and imagination, this heavily influenced Bengali second generation in their own belief about dowries. The British press reports on dowry deepened the second generation’s need to distinguish their social practices away from “traditional” construction. As reports do not explore the nuances that exist in dowry, but the “killings”, “domestic violence” and “abandonment”, dowry became a marker of “tradition” and one that second generation wish to distance.

British men who lust after the dowries of India's desperate brides

HUNDREDS of British Asian men have been accused of abandoning new brides in India after securing lucrative dowry payments. Police in India are investigating more than a thousand allegations from

⁹⁶ The couple would often have a wedding list at a department store or state on wedding card: “no boxed gifts,” which was understood to mean that the couple would prefer to accept money as gifts from attendees.

young women who claim that they have been lured into arranged marriages with the promise of a new life in Britain. Once dowries of up to £9,000 have been paid, the men abandon them, it is claimed. (Dhillon and Syal *The Times* March 11, 2006)

Killing in the name of dowry

In 2001 husbands and in-laws killed nearly 7,000 women because of inadequate dowry payments. Ranjana Kumari, an activist and academic who runs seven refuge centres in Delhi for women who suffer from domestic violence, says 60 to 70 cases a month are linked to rows over dowry, and that the demands can go on long after the wedding. (Ash *The Times* July 21, 2003)

First and second generation alike lamented about backward practices that allow bride burning or excessive dowry demands, pointing to affirmative action laws⁹⁷ and policies put into place in India. The second generation expressed distancing from dowry which was compounded with high levels of marriages outside of their own language/region, ethnicity and religion which made dowry a more unlikely prospect. Dowry has therefore found itself in relative obscurity in Britain for second generation Bengali women as being an untranslatable practice in marriages where partners were not Bengali or Hindu. “Being modern,” required the distinguishing of “traditional” South Asians from their own sensibilities of being “middle class,” “enlightened” and “educated”. This strategy of maintaining and the reproducing of “modern” middle class respectability however has been a precarious tactic for the first generation which has resulted in the unintended consequences such as postponement of marriage, and increased relationships and marriages with non Bengalis, non Indians and non-Hindus (which were less desirable to first generation parents).

Single Bengali Female: Postponement of marriage

Marriage rates amongst second generation women have seen a major decline from their mother’s generation. The majority of first generation women married before they were twenty-five, 18 per cent were married after 25 but before 30 and only 5 per cent (representing one woman) were married after 30. In my sample all first generation women were married before the age of 35. First generation women respondents had higher rates of marriage, mainly through parental involvement in their marriages in

⁹⁷ Such as the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961

India (although there were several self-selective marriages 18 per cent) the few women who came as single women to Britain, although tending to marry a little later, did marry. In comparison to the first generation, 51 per cent of second generation women were not married at 30, marking a change in the marital behaviour for just over half the second generation in my sample.

By the age of 35, 20 per cent of women I spoke to were not married, often to their parent's dismay. I would sometimes be approached myself by worried mothers who would try to convince me to "encourage" their daughters to get married or to ask me if I could help find their daughter a husband. As a married woman myself, I was often considered a natural ally to first generation mothers (by the first generation) in their attempts to convince their daughters to get married or to try and get their daughters a husband. Chitra Auntie, Nirmala's mother, approached me several times to help find Nirmala a possible husband. I usually tried to deflect requests from parents of trying to "convince" their daughters of getting married, by talking about the difficulties of a husband. In response to requests of finding a possible husband, I would say that I would "keep a look out". Nirmala, a highly educated woman in her early thirties had taken several routes to finding a partner, she had always dated but had not yet found her life partner. She was keen to be married and initially not averse to having parental involvement, but after several introductions through family friends and parents to what she described as to "disastrous" ends, she felt her parents were too involved in the process of finding a partner. This had caused many arguments with her parents, especially her mother who was keen to see her settled. On one occasion Nirmala's mother approached me to speak to me about finding a future husband for her daughter.

Nirmala's mother

. . . it doesn't matter to me if they are from another part of India, as long as they are a good person, do you know anyone like that? I just want her to be settled, that's all any mother wants for her children to have someone that will look after them, be with them. We wouldn't worry anymore, and then she could have children. You can't wait too long for children; otherwise it will be too late.

Nirmala felt that while her mother had her best interests at heart, that she was too interfering in her relationships and felt under constant pressure to get married:

Nirmala

I want to get married, but I want to do it on my own, in my own terms, without everyone looking over my shoulder. It is like every moment, she keeps saying you should get married, you should get married, I know that, it's like she thinks I have no idea that time is ticking. I want to get married; I don't need constant reminders about it. Telling me what I need to do to get married, loose some weight, or do this or do that, honestly people are out and out rude!!! My mum goes on and on about it and I am tired of it, it wears you down.

Nirmala's predicament was a widespread one for the unmarried second generation, women in their thirties. Pressure to be married came earlier and more intensely for women. Marriage became a common topic of conversation between parents and unmarried thirty-something daughters. Parents who had tended to be quite "measured" in their conversations about marriage with daughters in their early and mid-twenties had conversations, escalated to near panic as their daughters approached or passed 30 unmarried, as if to reflect their sense of urgency an unmarried daughter's situation. Pressure to marry could also be "subtle" as Raj describes (2003: 112) even broached with light humour and mocking, veiling the pressure of marriage which was felt all the same by these women. Emotional guilt was also a common tactic employed by some of the first generation in a bid to get their daughters to get married. The topic of marriage was slipped into conversation from the remotest of subject matters and could include family friends who may unwittingly be used to collude with parents, or others who are used as ambassadors of the message to marry. Shilpi a second generation woman in her thirties, was set upon by one such "ambassador" and expressed the pressure from outside the family.

Shilpi

I wish she [her mother] wouldn't go on; it just puts me off the whole idea of getting married. Then Mahua, [a family friend] started to have a go at me, telling me off telling me that mum was ill that I was making her worse by not getting married. I know she thought she was doing the right thing but where does she get off having a go at me. It is one thing my mum having a go, but Mahua was really laying into me about finding someone. I would love to meet someone, but marriage is too much. I would just like meet someone; I don't want marriage to be an issue straight away, if it happens, then it happens.

Some first generation take it upon themselves to “advise” and “enlighten” second generation women as to the “wisdom” of getting married. Tanuja, a seasoned singleton in her thirties recalled to me how she was “advised” by Nitin, a first generation “uncle”.

Nitin: When are you calling me to eat. [*He is referring to the wedding feast.*]
 Tanuja: [*Aware of his meaning, but feigning naïveté*] Oh uncle, you know you are welcome to come to our home at any time. You don’t have to be invited.
 Nitin: Not that kind of invite, a wedding one. You know Tanuja, that they only give IVF to women between the ages of 29-35 on the NHS.
 Tanuja: [*Long Pause.*] Oh all right uncle.

[*Later*]

Tanuja

Why is it that people feel a need to make comments like that to me. Because I’m not married, they feel a need to say stupid things. I mean I don’t think that he was being malicious or anything but people like him shouldn’t be allowed out and about in society. What a thing to say. What makes him feel that he can say things like that?

Marrying late, where women were deviating away from the “map of living” (Khandelwal 2002: 118), created an alternative set of values. Where previously, for example, marriage discussions were kept within the immediate family, they were now more likely to employ more overt strategies to encourage their daughters to get married, enlisting other first and second generation Bengali family friends. First generation parents were more accepting of their offspring marrying outside language/regional groups, ethnicity and religion. First generation were increasingly willing to be satisfied (although not necessarily happy) with their daughters being simply “married”.

The pressure to marry was intensely felt by the second generation. Comments were expressed by anyone from one’s own parents and relatives to friend’s parents, “aunties” and “uncles”, newly married couples, teenagers, friends, and pretty much anyone wishing to make a contribution to one’s singleton condition. The enquirer may become more persistent, even to the point of being offensive. For women, in particular, comments were especially suffocating. The second generation often complain that their parents were plying on the pressure and that they did so because of the “Bengali community”. That if people didn’t keep “saying things” that they wouldn’t have to

listen to their parent's complaining. There was often transference in many of the second generation's attempts to blame "society" for the pressure placed on them by their parents.

Tanuja

There is just too much pressure put on me to get married, my parents keep on at me and they are doing it because people keep asking them. It is the community.

Tanuja's comments reflected the pressure that first generation parents felt when other first generation were "enquiring" after their offspring's "situation". However parents are anxious, principally from their own sense of duty and obligation, which in turn, they place on their offspring, especially on their daughters where it is felt that biological clocks were ticking and potential grand-children were becoming a more distant prospect (see also Fruzzetti 1982, Raj 2003; Jhutti 1998 and Prinja 1999). Second generation women, while often fulfilling education and career aspirations were moving away from family expectations concerning marriage.

Increase in educational attainment

University attendance, higher education generally and employment have contributed to the postponement of marriage (Arum et al. 2008; Thornton, Axinn and Teachman 1995; Kalmijn 1991: 503; Marini 1978) amongst second generation Bengali women. The higher average age of first marriage has resulted in financially independent women with higher social status (Hamilton and Siow 2007). Since childhood, it was assumed that second generation Bengali women would obtain an education before they married, a comparable experience to Fergusson's descriptions of second generation American Japanese and American Chinese women where women similarly were expected to marry in their mid- to late twenties and even in their early thirties (Fergusson 2002: 150-151; see also Gerson 1985 and Havens 1973).

Gavron (1997) and Bhopal (1999) connected wanting and requesting of education as 'legitimate' motivation, as a strategy women employed, to avert early marriages. For second generation women, no such strategy needed to be applied as their parents had high expectations for them to enter into higher education and marriage would not be seriously contemplated until after studies were completed. There was not the

contradictory negative perception of education that Jhutti describes where education was perceived to ‘ruin’ a woman (Jhutti 1998: 134). Women’s education was not seen in terms of creating barriers, creating discordant relationships between a husband and wife. Nor was it seen as a criterion for simply being congenial partners for educated men and assisting children in their education (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007), quite the reverse. As discussed in chapter 7, *Marriage Selection*, Becker’s assumption of a strong sexual division of labour has been eroded very much amongst Bengalis, especially amongst the second generation.

Even for those who had established relationships with boyfriends, they were not marrying before their mid-twenties, often because their partners were so close in age, and trying to secure and establish their own employment. The “marriage conversation” proper usually developed after women reached their mid-twenties. Thus alterations and allowances within the ‘map of living’ (Khandelwal 2002: 118) for Bengali women had become a visible reality for second generation women. ‘[E]ducation of young women in the first stage, and their employment in the second, are accepted’ (Khandelwal 2002: 118). However, as Khandelwal continues, ‘yet otherwise the four-ashram “map of living” remains intact’ (118); i.e. a woman should be married within her twenties and then bear children within a few years of marriage. Deviations of marrying late⁹⁸ were regarded as ‘socially abnormal’ (Khandelwal 2002: 118). These ‘deviations’ made parents especially anxious of their daughter’s future.

Growing rejection of parental involvement in marriage

Papri

I just want to find someone on my own, without anyone interfering. I went down that route thanks, but no thanks. Constant asking what’s he like; do you like him; what do you think is he the one? What!! I want to get to know the bloody guy, I don’t need a focus group discussing *my* relationship after going out a couple of times. You got to wonder really, parents get really excited, they think he might be the one, I know that these introductions are not the same as having an arranged marriage, but I cannot stand the constant interference. I want to just do it on my own, without people being involved until I am ready to let them be involved. I want to have my relationship on my own.

⁹⁸ As with not establishing a career or not bearing children within a few years of marriage.

A growing need for ownership of one's own relationship was an important factor in the move away from parental involvement. Some unmarried women having met men through an "introduction", found this adaptation of parental involvement a difficult means of finding a partner. Yanagisako similarly argues that second and third generation Japanese American believed that marriages should be based on romantic love, and not duty; and that conjugal bond takes precedence over the filial bond (1985: 122). The second generation have reflected that sentiment with 79 per cent having self-selecting marriages in comparison to 19 per cent of the first generation. Not only was parental involvement increasingly considered undesirable, the default position of finding an Indian Bengali or a British Indian Bengali was also not always highly desirable.

Not marrying a man from India

Women were increasingly happy to marry other British Indians (see chapter 7: *Marriage Selection*) and saw them as suitable partners. However, those second generation women, who did want to marry a British Indian Bengali or Indian Bengali husband, felt that route had become increasingly closed to them. In comparison to second generation British Indian Bengali men who, when unable to find a suitable bride within a timeframe, had the option (if they so wished as many of my second generation male respondents did) to marry a Bengali woman from India. Second generation Bengali women, however, feel less able to consider this "back up plan". Marrying a Bengali man from India was not commonly considered a viable alternative for women when unable to find a spouse in Britain. The second generation often made associations with patriarchal attitudes with men from India, mistrusted their *true* intentions and believed that there is too much "cultural difference", which dissuaded them from entertaining this option. Laxmi, a second generation woman explained the marked difference between a British Bengali man marrying an Indian Bengali and a British Bengali woman marrying an Indian Bengali:

Laxmi

It is easy for guys, they can just go to India and get someone. . . For us, it's harder, we've got this image and we [women] can't just go to India and get a guy, it is more difficult. I wouldn't marry a guy from India, what will we have in common? If I marry a guy from abroad

it has to be from here, America or Canada. If I marry a guy from over there [India] and he comes to live in Britain, then I will wonder if he married me or my passport.

See look at Sutipa's husband, she got married to him and he didn't want to come here, he was happy in India, he just wanted to stay and run his own business, he clearly didn't marry her for her passport. And any way guys in India aren't used to women from Britain, we have had very different upbringing, we need to have things in common. I want to be able to talk about the last 30 years of my life, cultural things, things that I watched as a kid, know what I am about. If the guy was from India and has citizenship in another country like America or Canada, I would be happy to go.

Both first and second generations tended to believe that marriages where the woman was from Britain and the man from India made for a very difficult union as the woman is used to "independence" and is of a "modern" persuasion, which may cause conflict in the future between the couple.⁹⁹ However, where the role was reversed and the man was from Britain and the woman from India, it was believed that it made a better union as women from India were regarded as more "adaptable", causing fewer "issues" between the couple.¹⁰⁰ Most British Bengalis appreciated the difference and inequities between men and women finding partners in India. Therefore, not only was there a perceived "shortage" of eligible British Bengali men, the opportunities to find a husband from India was not considered a desirable option. As a result 38 per cent of women were marrying other Indians through self-selection. Women also voiced their concerns about difficulties meeting men generally, especially with demands on their time at work; also meeting eligible men, which they said is more difficult with age.

I identified several forms of resistance in women's narratives and during participant observation, where women stood their ground, refusing to be spoken to in a particular manner, also purposefully choosing to avoid confrontation and openly challenging the importance of marriage. Never-married second generation women in their mid-thirties in negotiating the boundaries of normalcy were also able to create a life which did not depend on being married. They were able to support themselves financially, able to purchase their own homes, have networks of friends and have meaningful relationships.

⁹⁹ Jhutti writes about the conflict for both men and women specifically in the Sikh practice (1998: 79).

¹⁰⁰ Which is not the case for Jhutti's Sikh's who consider women from India "backward".

Conclusion

Distancing South Asian social practices that were deemed “traditional” or “patriarchal” were key in the construction of British Indian Bengali middle class respectability. Strategies employed in asserting “being modern” require the distinguishing of women-associated social practices such as dowry, “arranged marriage” and *izzat*. In their vigour to dissociate themselves with constructs of a stereotypical “traditional” South Asian group, Bengalis engaged within oppositional constructs of sexual difference through a framework of “being modern” and “being tradition”. This fuelled a reductive and homogenous ‘notion of patriarchy or male dominance’ (Mohanty 1991: 53) amongst a particular ‘other’. Women therefore often sought to show control of their own relationships and bodies. Ideals of ‘romantic love’ (as discussed in the following chapter) were used to promote their separateness from “backward” and “traditional” cultures. Second generation women were also able to exercise a great deal of agency within their relationships with boyfriends, manoeuvring within an enabling structure. The strategy of constructing the appearance of a platonic friendship in front of parents and the engagement of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” strategy allowed the second generation to continue their relationship, censoring parents from their sexuality. This change of behaviour marked a break of female sexuality from family *izzat* and community. However, Bengali women were still framed in terms of a symbolic repository of group identity (Kandiyoti 1994: 382) the emphasis has instead shifted to education, professional employment, “independence,” self-reliance within a “modern,” middle-class, “liberal” community.

High levels of cultural capital were expected of second generation women, especially in the form of education. Women were expected to achieve high levels of education which was a reconfirmation of their entrance into “being modern” followed by a professional career path seen as a route to self-reliance and financial security. Women were not expected to marry before establishing a career. Education for Bengalis in this very specific context worked to reframe women’s sexuality, away from British Indian Bengali group identity. Parental attitudes were instrumental in the development away from *izzat* and dowry for instance. The normalcy of genders mixing amongst the second generation through childhood, through to adulthood, worked to construct a context within which women were able to maintain a relationship without coming into

conflict with parent's sensibilities about their sexuality. Bengalis' sidestepping of the issue of the female body as 'a site of struggle between the proponents and opponents of modernity' (Moghissi 1999: 20), have placed less emphasis on the control of female sexuality. Women's sexuality was not seen in terms of restraint and discipline. While the sexuality of women matters in the broader context, women's 'purity' *per se* was not used as a defining capital¹⁰¹ within the image of a "modern" and "liberal" British Indian Bengali.

The first generation women's experience of education and employment since entering Britain, mainly in 1960s and early 1970s, has informed and internalised the expectation placed on the second generation – that education, employment and marriage were compatible allies (even after having children) in maintaining a lifestyle in Britain. Although for most of the first generation the process was reversed, where they married first and then embarked on further education, training and employment. For the second generation, the expectations are intensified, with hopes of higher education, professional careers and then marriage (followed by children). In practice this meant that most second generation entered and entertained the marriage market later than their predecessors. This, coupled with the second generation's wishes to assert "being modern" through 'romantic love', was often directly associated with self-selecting marriages which they referred to as "love marriages" as if to intensify the association; and the rejection of "arranged marriage". Resulting in high numbers of unmarried women in their thirties.

Notions of "being modern" with regard to unmarried Bengali women have led to what Abu-Lughod (1998: vii) describes as the ambiguities and contradictions of undertaking of women's 'modernity' and the '[h]idden costs and unanticipated constraints, novel forms of discipline and regulation, and unintended consequences accompanied such programs'. Agency enacted in second generation women was embraced, especially when a woman followed the 'map of living', regardless of whether she had a self-selecting marriage or married a Bengali. However, for those deviating from the 'map of living', not marrying within their twenties (or even early thirties), were subject to more criticism, extending in some instances to parents berating or teasing their children in

¹⁰¹ Knowledge of sexual relations of an unmarried woman may be seen in terms of embarrassments, as opposed to an affront to honour.

public as to their singleton status. “Being modern” was producing parent-perceived cost of unmarried daughters a potential loss of grandchildren and their perceived daughter’s (as well as their own) happiness. Women through agency were shifting and challenging the ‘map of living’ both the timing of events, and whether to engage with the map at all. The following chapter explores another element which has influenced changes in the ‘map of living’, “love”.

Chapter 6

Love and “Modern” Respectability

This chapter examines the desires of British Indian Bengali second generation to “fall in love”. The associations of romantic love with notions of equality and individual fulfilment were accompanied by a “modern” middle class respectability. The notion of romantic love was a desirable ideal amongst second generation Bengalis, as it reinforced the ways that gender roles were envisaged. Identification with romantic love confirmed the second generation’s position as middle class, “modern”, “educated”, “assertive” and “independent”. Parental approval (or at least parental acceptance) of romantic love validated the second generation further as authentically “modern”. Romantic love provided an antidote for the image of South Asian women in the media as victims of forced marriages by “uneducated” and “traditional” South Asian families. It became crucial for the second generation to convey romantic love, even where there is high parental involvement in their marriage, this was particularly the case for Bengali women whose ability to have a romantic relationship with her partner conveyed her family’s “liberal”, “modern” and “educated” outlook. Often, as will be shown below, who the second generation fell in love with was generally socially approved love. Bourdieu states that ‘love disposed to succeed is nothing other than love of one’s own social destiny that brings socially predestined partners together along the apparent random paths of free choice’ (1990: 160). Interestingly however, those ‘acceptable’ criteria of marriage for British Indian Bengali second generation had increasingly moved away from “traditional” markers of regional-language, caste, religious and ethnic markers and were exchanging them for “modern” attributes such as: education; occupation; social class; attitudes; abilities; beliefs and aspirations (see chapter 7: *Marriage Selection*).

The increase in self-selective marriages, commonly called “love marriage,” was indicative of how attitudes to ‘love’ had come to the fore. Self-selective marriages were usually seen as marriages where “love” was the major motivation for marrying. However, the ideas surrounding love were not confined to the category of self-selecting marriages alone. Notions of love and romance have permeated all forms of marriage whether they were “love”, “assisted” or “arranged” marriages. Romantic love was an

ideology as well as a lifestyle (Dwyer, R. 2000: 13), while a lifestyle was discernible and tangible (to a degree); the ideology of love has crept into and fused into all types of marriage. Romantic love was not only a *desirable* element within marriage but an *expected* element in a relationship for second generation in particular. Any suggestion that someone's marriage was not based on love, either initially or growing through time was seen as a sad matter. The emphasis on romantic love varied amongst families, individuals, situations and the type of marriage involved.

I intend to explore the debates and strategies employed by the second generation concerning the relationship between romantic love; "being modern" and how love has become a signifier of identity. Whilst romantic love for these young people might not represent a wider democratising way of life as Giddens argues (1992). It was an aspirational "modern" commodity, towards which to head and produce strategies connecting love and "being modern" (Taylor 1999; Lipset 2004). Ahearn (2001: 76); Duben & Behar (1991: 95-101) and Giddens (1990: 122) have all tried to connect "the modern" to the intimate, considering the development from arranged marriages to "love" marriages, which has connotations of the transformation of "tradition" to "modern". Ahearn's illuminating work in *Invitation to Love* (2001) explores this shift in marriage practices in Nepal. In this study, literacy skills were applied to the writing of love letters; causing shifts in conceptions of what it means to be a "modern" or a "developed" person through altering notions of selfhood, love, desire and agency. Hart (2007: 345-347) questions the link between individualism as a location for romantic love and demonstrations of desire; and whether this requires a split from extended kin networks.¹⁰² For Bengalis the relationship was more nuanced. Here the second generation and their parents colluded to produce a strategy of romantic love as a vessel for "being modern", regardless of whether a marriage was a "love," "assisted," or "arranged" marriage.

Marriage was often spoken of in terms of typology. 'Love' and 'arranged' marriages have the established profile of years of marriage categorisation, thus forming deeply into the consciousness of Bengalis' understanding of marriage as has also been documented in academia (see Ballard 1978; Baumann 1996:1; Ballard and Ballard

¹⁰² Hart notes numerous recent anthropological studies that centre their research findings on this very premise: Ahearn 2001; Collier 1997; Hirsch 2003; Rebhun 1999; Yan 2003.

1977; Michaelson 1983; Bhachu 1985; Raj 1997; Prinja 1999; Baumann 1996; Donner 1999). Chris Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan (2007) discuss how in popular discourse love marriage was most often set in opposition to arranged marriage, where in reality it was far more hazy. Young people in Fuller and Haripriya's paper when meeting a suitable person of the same caste, would only start a relationship and certainly only marry if parents approved. Likewise parents considered their children's 'prospective personal happiness' in arranging marriages for their offspring (2007: 27-35).

In a comparative work in Tokyo and Detroit, Blood (1967) places the issues of love and arranged marriages on a continuum. At one end "pure arranged marriages" and on the other "pure love marriage". In between exists various combinations, where the level of parental involvement is deliberated on, love and romance is weighed up and thus divided into "qualified" arranged marriages, semi-arranged marriages and "qualified" love marriages or semi-love marriages (1967: 13-35). Placing marriage type on a continuum was a helpful way of understanding the nuances and dynamics of marriage beyond arbitrarily placed in categories of "arranged" or "love" marriage. "Assisted marriages" and "introductions" have increasingly entered the vocabulary of both informants and academia, describing marriages with parental involvement (see Dhooleka 2003 and Prinja 1999) where the second generation may meet independently, date and/or make the ultimate decision whether or not to marry. However, within this love-arranged continuum *romantic* love is sought.

For the second generation there was a strong pre-occupation about the differences between "love" and "arranged" marriages. Often individuals, families and couples employed strategies to project "being modern" within a marriage where there was parental involvement. Self-selection and romantic love automatically projected itself as "modern". "Being modern" was used to distinguish from "traditional" South Asians in Britain, in a broader sense but also specifically within ideas of marriage. Schein argues that identity and power can be performed in seemingly intimate and private realms (1999: 363-4, 368). The second generation expressed their "being modern" through expressions of the intimate and romantic love. These expressions were fused with self definition of class status within the middle classes.

Brady documents how in the early nineteenth century a new definition of middle class materialised in the urban northeast of America. At its centre was the ‘democratic family’ (Brady 1991: 87) where romantic love became more significant, where ‘parental influence was replaced by a new commitment to voluntary affection between young people’ (1991: 95). Similarly Fuller and Narasimhan made a case of companionate marriage as ‘a major social development’ (2007: 33) where romantic love was seen as a norm for the middle classes.

Stone (1990) intimately relates a companionate marriage to individual freedom of choice. Stone places it within the context of four basic grounds for marriage which influences the choice of partner (in Britain in the eighteenth-century). The first motive for marriage was the economic, social or political consolidation. Offspring were not consulted as the marriage was primarily a contract between two families for the exchange of concrete benefits. The second option saw parents selecting a future spouse, but offspring had the power to veto. The third was where offspring were able to choose their own partner but were subject to vetoes by their parents. The fourth possibility was through romantic love, where offspring selected their partner and then informed their parents (1990: 181-2). Fuller and Narasimhan argue that there was an additional option that has transpired where parents and offspring mutually choose a partner ‘motivated by an ideal of companionate ‘emotional satisfaction’ that was not deemed to depend solely on the children’s own personal choice’ (2007: 33). This was reflected in the emergence of “assisted marriages” in Britain, a newly articulated route to marriage, where there was parental involvement but also a self-conscious display of romantic love. While Fuller and Narasimhan argue that for the Vattimas this fifth way was an ideal aspired to, where it showed ‘affective individualism’ they also recognised its limitations:

Plainly, though, affective individualism in India is less radical than its western counterpart, which presupposes that individual freedom is compromised by any relationship with others (including parents) that is not freely entered into. (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007: 33)

It is this *partial* individual freedom that for many second generation is still not linked strongly enough to respect for an individual’s right to privacy, self-expression and free will (Stone 1990: 151). Even this arranged-companionate marriage is a source of embarrassment for some second generation. It suggests, of the second generation, that they are being “practical” rather than “romantic”, “backward” or “traditional” rather

than “modern”, “dependent” (on parents and the system of arrangement) rather than “independent”. For some of the second generation this meant that there is a split with the authority of parents in favour of individualism, it was not however an uncompromising rupture, there was accommodation made by both parents and offspring.

As a married daughter of a Bengali family I was often asked to take part in rituals, witnessed many smaller family gatherings, taken into confidences of second generation particularly, but also by the first generation, who saw me as a pro-marriage ally. I witnessed how marriages were being encompassed in both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ practices, how romantic love was not confined to “love marriages” nor ‘tradition’ confined to “arranged marriages”. Ethnographic research has started to reflect the move away from framing romantic love as only an aspect of “love marriage” (see Donner 2002: 84-8; Nishimura 1998: 53; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007).

Amongst my second generation informants finding a marriage partner through “romantic” means was universally aspired to. Of the 61 married second generation, 87 per cent had dated before they married (including their marital partner or prior to marriage). 58 per cent of those partaking in marriages where there was parental involvement had dated previously to marriage. Those, who had not dated previously, tended to be from older second generation who had come as older children or were born around the sixties onwards.¹⁰³ Of the 90 first generation men and women (half of which were spoken to in more depth) whom I asked the question of “what kind of marriage” they had had, 16 per cent said that they had “love marriages”, while the remaining 84 per cent described their marriage as “arranged”, mainly arranged by parents or other elders often with little or no courtship prior to the wedding. The shift in second generation asserting romantic love reflects this transformation of what it means “to be modern” and distancing themselves from the first generation.

¹⁰³ While a “love marriage” within India could be seen as a possibility, the idea of these children having “love marriages” within Britain with non-Bengalis or non-Indians were considered in almost all cases, as a step into the unknown. There were a few self-selecting marriages that occurred mostly between first generation men and ‘white’ women. Responses to the mixed ethnicity marriages were varied from other Bengalis, dependent on the relationship to the man, i.e. if they were a friend and individual themselves, there was no universal response. However, there was an acknowledgement and awareness of mixed marriages were not only a possibility amongst Bengalis but were actually happening.

Romantic love and sociological understanding

Romantic love and its practices in ‘modern’ Europe have been described in terms of being exceptional (Goody 1998:98). The theoretical debate of locating romantic love firmly within the modern West has been criticised particularly by post colonialists. As discussed earlier in this thesis, the presentation of modernity as synonymous with westernisation is problematic, and does not take into account alternate modernities as developed elsewhere. Critiques of totalising modernity (such as Chakrabarty 2000; Trouillot 1995 and Gilroy 1993) make the case for *alternative* modes of modernity, moving away from the universality of modernity. However, romantic love has been positioned with reference to historical causes. Giddens (1992) claimed that the emergence of ideas of romantic love began in the late eighteenth century. Stone documents how the romantic movement coincided with the rise of the novel in the nineteenth century, where ‘society at large accepted a new idea—that it was normal and indeed praiseworthy for young men and women to fall passionately in love’ (Stone 1988:19).

Bertilsson (1986) and Lindholm (1998) argue that many sociologists have supported historians in their framing of romantic love within ‘modernity’. Person (1991, 1988) understood romantic love to be primarily from the West, which he argued emerged in the twelfth century Languedoc, a view that was followed by de Rougement (1956) and by numerous European historians (Goody 1998: 105). Weber considered love as the modern culture of eroticism. His work was concerned with the transformation of human values, produced by capitalism and commodity exchange, he argued that especially when sexuality was disconnected from religion, it became “irrational” and thus the ‘real kernel of life’ (Weber 1958:345).

Romantic love was elevated to a unique status where it was influential in the origins of the modern family, where it disrupted kin networks and marked the beginnings of the industrial age (Stone 1977, 1988; Flandrin 1979). Giddens argued that ideas of romantic love were ‘diffused through much of the social order’ (1992: 26) and a means to ‘modern salvation’ (Lipset 2004: 206). Durkheim’s (1964) connection of economic change to the rise of individualism provides the origin for the functional conceptualisation of the relationship between romantic love, the individual and

‘modernity’ (Lipset 2004: 206). In conforming with both romanticist and modernist views of the self (Kashima, et al. 2002: 179-180), Durkheim (1964) asserted that the self becomes distinguished from society, bonded to notions of agency. Thus individual agency displaces agency arising from ‘the relationships of which both self and society are inextricably composed’ (Lipset 2004). Given this functional structure, romantic love is seen as two opposing ways: as ‘either integrative or disruptive’ (Lipset 2004: 205).

The disruptive power of romantic love through this construct can cause individuals to challenge society’s norms and values. This can be further enabled where society within this structure is increasingly moving away from kinship, religion, caste and generally collective statuses structures moving towards trust in expert systems. Thus romantic love can be a means to attain meaning and warmth in its idealisations and mutuality of romantic relationships (Parsons 1955). This also suggests that all those who enter into self-selecting marriage do so in opposition to parents and is done with complete disregard to collective statuses, moving romantic love towards a default rhetoric of “being modern”. Bourdieu, however, demystifies ‘love’ by arguing that in most cases (see: Bourdieu 1990) falling in love is usually done with those who are already socially acceptable.

Ultimately Giddens’ structuring of romantic love and the “pure relationship” was consistent with his broader argument of ‘modernity’ being situated in the West. Giddens argued that love was thought to be a disruptive force which could lead individuals to disregard their everyday obligations, jeopardising ‘social order and duty’ (1992: 38) and thus a threat, contributing to a ‘narrative form’ for love relationships (1992: 39, 40).

Giddens (1990; 1992), in considering the connection between love and relationships within the construct of ‘modernity’, did so within this particularly universalising Western formation of history. Giddens’ construction of the ‘pure relationship’, as two people being together just for the sake of emotional intimacy and sexual fulfilment, is a contract comparable, Illouz argued, to that at the centre of the public and democratic sphere (Illouz 1997: 206). Goody also argued that Giddens’ view of romantic love was Eurocentric (Goody 1998: 102; Lipset 2004) and that it cannot be viewed as a

distinctively Western phenomenon. As Gadlin noted of romantic love it was not ‘the Siamese twin of modernity’ (1977: 84).

Although Goody agreed with Giddens about the gender of romance, drawing on Mauss, Goody (1998:104) dismissed Giddens’ assertions that romantic love introduced a new narrative form of introspection based in the eighteenth century and that life histories were “‘individualised’ from the beginning of time, with notions of self” and that it was universal and could take different forms (Goody 1998:103). Goody argued that the notion of romantic love and its reflexivity was derived from literacy, which was not bound to ‘modernity’, Europe or class and he states many instances in many countries where there were literary traditions, citing India, China and the Near East as examples. Goody stated that writing ‘creates an object outside oneself in a way speech cannot do, at least in the same clear-cut fashion’ (Goody 1998: 110-111). Ahearn’s (2001) and Duben and Behar’s (1991) have through their ethnographies linked newly acquired literacy skills and cultural phenomenon respectively as reasoning for increased romantic relations.

While Lipset is sympathetic to Goody’s critique of Giddens, both Besnier (1995: 3) and Lipset (2004: 207) himself argue strongly that Goody’s claims severely overstates literacy’s consequences and that the effects of symbolic structures is ‘crucially tied to the social practices that surround it and to the ideological system in which it is embedded (Besnier 1995: 3). Thus ‘literacy cannot be studied independently of the social, political and historical forces that shape it’ (1995: 3) and Lipset (207) argues that empirically there is nothing intrinsic in literacy to support the notion that with literacy comes a ‘progressively more loving society’ (Gillis 1988: 89).

Returning to Giddens, further criticism has been levelled at him, where his ‘general claims’ of potentials for ‘radical and positive social change through personal life’ (Jamieson 1998: 479; see also Sica 1986) is optimistic and simplistic as it de-emphasises gender and economic structural inequalities. Gross and Simmons (2002) however question Jamieson’s data, where she finds couples who are able to generate a ‘sense of caring, intimate, equal relationships” (Jamieson 1998:484) yet Gross and Simmons argue that these couples ‘do so in part to mask glaring gender inequalities in

such areas as sexual satisfaction, housework and child-care arrangements, and control over money' (2002: 541).

If we are even to accept Giddens conceptualisation of 'modernity', Giddens' earlier work (1991) explains how contemporary relationships do not achieve pure love relationships in all instances. Giddens states that the extent to which the intimate is transformed is dependent on 'context and differential socioeconomic position, in common with most of the traits of modernity' (1991:98). However, I am in agreement with Grover's overall conclusion that Giddens does not take into account the breadth of the marriage experience in a non-Western context (Grover 2006: 206-211) nor different sensibilities and histories, nor different accounts of modernity.

Love and romance in the South Asian context

Reminiscent of Giddens' description of passionate love (1992), earlier South Asian anthropological representations of romantic love were associated singularly with "love marriages". Fruzzetti (1982) and Vatuk (1972) have written how in the South Asian context love was viewed in terms of deviancy, being 'socially disapproved of . . . hidden or denied if discovered – for it is often earnestly sought in private – these terms have derogatory connotations' (1972: 88-89). Fruzzetti described how 'love marriages' were considered '*kharap*' (immoral, bad), by Bengali *samaj* (society) who would not consent to such marriages (1982). Donner argues that early work such as that by Vatuk, written in the early seventies have been repeated in recent literature even though love marriages have increasingly been taking place in urban centres (Donner 1999: 114).

Romantic love has been pinpointed, as it has in the West, to a specific moment in time. Chakrabarti stated that notions of love and romance have been influential since the mid-nineteenth century, certainly amongst the intelligentsia (1995: 300). Bengali writers especially Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94), Rabindranth Tagore (1861-1941) and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938), have been heralded as Western-influenced conduits for a Bengali concept of romantic love. As in the Western construction of romantic love, in urban Bengal, novels and literacy were seen as the gateway to individual agency. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Durgeshnandini* (2002) the first widely regarded Bengali romantic novel, written in 1865, was seen as a catalyst for an

increasing demand for marrying a spouse of their own choice and discussions concerning pre-marital courtship emerged from this new consciousness. Sambuddha Chakrabarti gave an account to this effect from the 1850s and 1860s. However, he admits this constituted a small number of men and in the 'nineteenth century this was almost exclusively confined to the realm of thought. Society was not so liberal as to allow a bride to 'choose her own match' (Chakrabarti 1995: 309).

Bankim's presentation of love had roots in both the 'European romantic tradition and in the Indian religious tradition' (Roy 1993: 47). Rabindranath Tagore, who came after Bankim, developed and continued to emphasise romantic love and to develop the image of women. He moved the stories out of Bankim's historical settings (as imaginary settings was necessitated by the unsympathetic reception to romantic love) to a semi-urban milieu. He framed the women in his stories outside of the kitchen and bedroom into the parlour, where they engaged in discussion and debate with men, *Chirakumar Sabha* was one such example where Tagore attempted to shatter stereotypes of dichotomous images of women as a respectable mother and desirable sex-object to a combination of mother, wife, friend and mistress. Many of his stories dealt with conjugal love, including *Aparichita (The Unknown Woman)* where after a marriage negotiation was broken off after the amount of dowry could not be agreed upon, the woman accidentally meets her would-have-been husband on a trip. She gets close to him. She pretends that she is living as the ideal good wife for the satisfaction of her own self-image, even though the wedding has not taken place. *Ghare Baire (The Home and the World)* was another of Tagore's novels where the heroine was caught between love for her lover and duty toward her lover and husband. Whereas her husband accentuates her responsibility as housewife and companion, his friend emphasises her image as a powerful goddess who should not be satisfied with the role as a housewife, instead inspire men to rise up to free the motherland. Roy (1993: 53) observes that Tagore (like Sarat Chandra) highlighted the self-centred nature of husbands who do not care to demonstrate or express their love for their wives. Despite their apparent dependability, Bengali husbands failed to offer the emotional security a woman in love requires.

This interplay between 'Western' world ideas with the inner-sphere was written about extensively by Partha Chatterjee (1989; 1993) who explored how culture in postcolonial

India was divided into two spheres where the inner-spiritual sphere was the realm of religion, women, caste and the family which were protected from the ‘modern’ second sphere of the outer, material Western world. This laid the social principles which produced a foundation for feminine virtues. Although Chatterjee did not speak of romantic love explicitly, one could easily infer that the ‘[m]odesty, or decorum in manner and conduct’ (1989: 626) required of middle class women in pre-colonial times to act in manner where spiritual virtues were to be maintained at all times (1989). Sambuddha Chakrabarti (1995) reflected on Chatterjee’s assertions that although courtship was rare in Bengal in the nineteenth century, a small number of cases where the bride and groom knew each other before their marriage emerged. However, these unions had the consent of their guardians and were confined to the *educated urban class*. Pre-marital acquaintance between spouses were restricted to the Brahmos where uninhibited mixing between the genders were allowed (Chakrabarti 1995: 312).

The association between love and the ‘modern’ steadily developed in a similar way to the Western construction of love, where the middle classes develop companionship through ‘modernity’. The nineteenth century, Chakrabarti notes, saw changes come after marriage, where a few husbands wanted to “reduce the distance between the spouses in married life” (1995: 310) and began to educate their wives.¹⁰⁴ Bharati Ray documents how literature, poetry, film, ‘modern’ ideas and education of women pre-1947 further changed the landscape of marriage for women, especially amongst the urban middle-class. The interest in ideas of love was certainly reflected through the demand for films and literature about love:

The popularity of the film, *Udayar Pathe* (1944), depicting a girl from an upper class background linking her lot with an indigent writer, as well as the repeated editions (twenty-six reprints in as many years, indicating a continued demand) of Surat Chandra Chatterjee’s *Parineeta* (‘The Wedded One’, Calcutta 1914), a love story ending in a marriage of choice, are symptomatic of the story ending in a marriage and family . . . (Ray 1995: 371)¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Notable examples given by Sambuddha Chakrabarti (1995: 310); were of Prasanna Kumar Tagore’s son Jnanendramohan Tagore who educated his wife Balasundari Devi (1833-1851); Satyendranath Tagore requested Hemendranath (brother of Satyendranath) to teach English to Jnanadanandini Devi. Girishchandra Sen taught his wife, Keshabchandra Sen’s father encouraged his wife Saradasundari Devi to study. There were many examples cited, see pp. 310-311 of Sambuddha Chakrabarti (1995).

¹⁰⁵ Ray also mentions Radharani Devi’s (b. 1903) poems, written under the pseudonym of Aparajita Devi she wrote about a young women who expresses her desire of marrying a man who has ‘a liberal outlook,

Co-education, notes Ray, in higher educational institutions such as Calcutta University, and subsequently Scottish Church College and Presidency College began to allow mixing between men and women, leading to a few women marrying out of choice, a number of inter-caste marriages and even inter-community marriages, especially in the 1930s, much to the ‘consternation of the conservatives’ (Ray 1995: 371-372). Ray observed that the freedom struggle (371) and ‘women’s gainful employment (however limited)’ together began to create an environment for independence. Through employment, specifically after the Second World War, ‘at least some of the young women had access to an independent source of income and were able to contribute to the maintenance of the joint family and hence wield some power in the family. They could also maintain themselves, if they so wished, outside the patriarchal family structure’ (372)¹⁰⁶. With post-Independence came a trend of widespread education of women and of the acceptance of co-educational schools” which Donner says were “rightly held responsible for the rise in love marriages” (Donner 2002: 83)¹⁰⁷.

Donner noted that “love marriages” had ‘become a widespread practice in Calcutta’ (2002: 82), which although outnumbered by “arranged marriages” were becoming increasingly acceptable. The first generation of Bengalis who came to Britain in the sixties and seventies were more tolerant to the idea of “love marriages” even with a few “love marriages” in their midst, but Donner airs caution:

In short, parents experience a dilemma, as romantic love and self-chosen marriage partners are widely accepted – as long as other people’s children are involved. (Donner 2002: 85)

Donner’s observations into how romantic love was viewed by parents in Calcutta, was a helpful insight into how the experiences of Indian Bengalis have transpired in Britain. The first generation mainly had “arranged marriages” themselves but were sympathetic to the ideas of romantic love in principle as in Calcutta.

not merely a University degree’. “She would ‘like to have just one or two children, and motherhood must come a few years after marriage’.

¹⁰⁶ Ray points to Sarat Chandra Chatterjee’s last unfinished novel, *Agami Kal* (The Coming Age), was set precisely in that context.

¹⁰⁷ Donner also states that there are other opportunities for men and women to mix and in a range of contexts, citing Durga puja as an example.

Perhaps the difficulty within the South Asian literature was the use of the words “love marriage”, which united love and marriage and by *implication* precluded other types of marriages having romantic love as an element of their relationship. Perhaps the more helpful phrase of “self-selecting marriages” (without the quotation marks and within the sphere of academe) would be a more helpful description of the way a couple met and one way to disentangle romantic love from sole ownership of “love marriages”. However, beyond the linguistics, when romantic love was adopted as a component of “being modern” and was attributed to Westernisation it similarly made the assertion that self-selecting marriage was a product of ‘agency’, ‘modernity’ and ‘individualism’ while “arranged marriages” were ‘patriarchal’, demand ‘obedience’ and ‘passivity’ and are ultimately loveless. Hart (2007: 349-352) argues that schemas such as developed by Fox (1975: 182) which made this very assertion simplified a system of marriage which was significantly more nuanced.

Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) note that many anthropologists such as Donner (2002: 84-8), Trautmann (2003: 1125) and Seymour (1999: 211-14) have acknowledged how a couple’s personal happiness has become an important feature in many marriages regardless whether they are “arranged” or “love”. However, they ‘tend to reproduce their informants’ preoccupation with the contrast between “love” and “arranged” marriage (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007: 32). This was true even when the marriage categories were extended to a third category of ‘assisted marriages’/ ‘introductions’ which was used as a means to bridge the “gap” between ‘love’ and arranged’ marriage. Marriages were much more fluid (Donner 2002: 83)¹⁰⁸, varied and contextual¹⁰⁹, as any type of marriage could contain haziness about how a particular marriage was formed and established. If able to transcend marriage categorisations of ‘arranged’, ‘assisted’ and ‘love’ then it could allow for a marriage to be understood not as a restricted single category but subject to a more nuanced understanding. Yet, it was important to note that regardless of the subtleties that existed in the experience of second generation marriage, marriages were sometimes spoken of dualistic terms by the informants themselves.

¹⁰⁸ Donner acknowledges the evidence of ‘the differentiation between love and arranged marriages’ amongst ‘South Asian communities in the West’.

¹⁰⁹ Both Baumann (1996: 151) and Prinja (1999: 88) write about constraints of “arranged marriages” as a defining category.

For the first generation, self-selecting marriages were described as a “love marriage”, or they may describe it as “*nije pello*” [found themselves] or “*nije tic korlo*” [they fixed it themselves]. When marriages have parental involvement, first generation parents often say “*amra tic korichi*” [we fixed it], “*amra meye keh deklum*” [we saw the girl] are phrases used often to describe these second generation marriages. However, for the second generation, marriages were usually spoken of in terms of either ‘arranged’ or ‘love’ marriages, and increasingly using the term “assisted” as a way to describe second generation unions that might not “fit” their definitions of either “love” or “arranged” marriage. Second generation informants were very wary of their marriages being termed as “arranged”. Often to distinguish their relationship as a part of “being modern”, the second generation used a strategy of demonstrating romantic love in their relationship, making assertions about their “liberal” parents, their agency and individual freedom. The intent of the second generation was to sever the link between their marriage and “being traditional”, parent involvement was reconstructed so as to be conducive to their ideas of “being modern”.

Bengali marriages in Britain, whether self-selecting or with varied levels of parental involvement, were then cast out of this particular understanding of “being modern” and not allowed a forum to understand a more subtle, more localised comprehension of marriage and “being modern”. Lipset and Hart acknowledge that young people ‘do perceive romantic love as a distinctively modern relationship discourse’ (Lipset 2004: 208). With representation of romantic love proliferated globally within the media, advertising, literature, visual arts, etc the idea of love was endorsed as *modern* and *Western*. For many of my informants, romantic love was perceived as characteristically, a “modern” relationship discourse, being viewed as an exclusive motivational basis for courtship leading to marriage; even where parents were involved in the process. Thus romantic love as a part of being “modern” did not follow a singular consistent or predictable pattern (Appadurai 1996: 5; Lipset 2004: 207).

There has been a growing shift away from constructing romantic love as the exclusive domain of “love marriages” see: Hart (2007), Ahern (2001), Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) and Donner (2002: 84-8). A man or woman having a self-selecting marriage did not automatically imply that there were no considerations of status. Conversely having a marriage arranged by parents did not mean that romantic love could not develop

amongst considerations of lineage and status. Indeed, marriages were complex formations where there were self-conscious performances of romantic love (Ahearn 2001; Collier 1997; Rebhun 1999) that were not bound to a particular typology (i.e. arranged, assisted and love marriages).

Searching for love: The second generation's expressions of love

First generation parents, like their offspring, were acutely aware of the image "arranged marriage" had in Britain, especially the image portrayed in the press and media. Reports such as described in *The Guardian* talked of forced marriages in terms of being 'forced into an *arranged marriage*' [my emphasis] as opposed to a 'forced marriage'. It resulted in yet another impediment to the reality of arranged marriage creating an image of arranged marriage as a bounded and alien concept within Britain.

Murder fear in arranged marriage

Police have launched a hunt for the body of a teenage Asian girl more than two months after she went missing following a failed attempt at an arranged marriage. They fear she may have been murdered.

Shafilea Ahmed, 17, from Warrington, Cheshire, was introduced to a potential suitor when she visited Pakistan in February for a family wedding. But she turned him down. She suffered serious injuries while she was there after she swallowed bleach or toilet cleaner in mysterious circumstances. (Carter 2003, *The Guardian*)

Court annuls arranged marriage

A teenage bride has had her arranged marriage annulled in a rare legal move after a judge ruled she had been "deceived and frightened" into marrying.

Aneeka Sohrab, from Glasgow, was a 16-year-old schoolgirl when she was forced to marry Raja Khan, a 19-year-old student who had arrived in the UK from Pakistan three months before the wedding in a Glasgow mosque in December 1998.

. . . When she rebelled, she said she was told she would bring disgrace to her family and would have to be sent to Pakistan. Her mother also threatened suicide. . . "These mothers were of a different generation and were both themselves in arranged

marriages,” he said. “No doubt they thought they were doing the best for their children.” (Scott: 2002, *The Guardian*)

Early academic work in Britain on second generation and arranged marriages gave very specific and polarised understandings of arranged marriages¹¹⁰ where the second generation were described in terms of being ‘betwixt and between’ two cultures. Avtar Brah in her thesis (1979), her article (1978: 197-206) on teenage South Asians experience in Southall and Catherine Ballard’s article (1978), on first and second generation Ramgarhia Sikh’s experience of arranged marriage attempted to address this polarisation by arguing that arranged marriages were adapted in Britain, through descriptions of various strategies. Ballard and Brah attempted to show how arranged marriages existed in a mutually amenable manner amongst the generations, thus moving away from discussing arranged marriage in terms of ‘unchanging, bounded and insular natures of Asian culture’ (Prinja 1999: 90) within Britain. Prinja used Baumann to illustrate the lack of agency attributed to Asian informants (90).

Whatever any “Asian” informant was reported to have said or done was interpreted with stunning regularity as a consequence of their “Asianess”, their “ethnic identity” or the “culture” of their “community”. All agency seemed to be absent, and culture an imprisoning cocoon or a determining force. (Baumann 1996: 1)

Prinja (1999) argued that individuals were able to exercise a deep level of agency within arranged marriages¹¹¹, through various strategies used by her informants to choose their own marriage partners within the informant’s own caste group. Dhooleka (2003) also recognises how the arranged marriage system allowed young people to make rejections, but in culturally specific ways. Young people were able to negotiate their own requirements and wishes into its framework. Comparative literature from India has been particularly helpful in illustrating how marriage systems have changed for young people. Fuller and Narasimhan (2007)¹¹² illustrated how in caste endogamous arranged marriages increasingly the potential happiness of offspring in their marriage was a

¹¹⁰ For examples see: Rex, (1982) and Watson, J. (1977).

¹¹¹ Although it must also be accepted that same levels of agency is not an universal feature of all arranged marriages. See: Bhopal, K. (1997). Thus agency is often not allowed a space for subtlety. The consequences of veering off the path of an arranged marriage may result in, ruined *izzat* of the family and being ostracised, as often these women’s roles are defined in terms of boundary markers and carriers of group identity. See Rozario, S. (1992: 79-102).

¹¹² Presented at the Middle class Workshop at University of Sussex, 12th and 13th July 2007

consideration. As Fuller and Narasimhan (2007); Donner (2002: 84-8); and Hart (2007), observe, they were able to transcend the ‘preoccupation with the contrast between arranged and love marriage’ (2007: 32)¹¹³.

Second generation Bengalis, however, are more reluctant to associate themselves with arranged marriages in attempts to champion “being modern”, even when marriages *were* being arranged by parents. Arranged marriages existed in various manifestations, where romantic love was enabled and approved of through various strategies employed by second generation. Parents and offspring used romantic love as a modernising tool in their presentation of marriage where there was parental involvement, particularly to British White people but also amongst other Bengalis and other ethnic groups. Whether a courtship developed after an engagement (especially when one of the intended spouses are from India) or after an initial introduction where a relationship grew, romantic love was used as a gateway into “being modern”. The second generation communicated and negotiated this politics of identity and “being modern” through expressions and interpretations of intimacy and courtship prior to and after marriage.

Arranging romantic love

The second generation whose marriages had involved parental involvement often felt pressurised to present what was regarded as a modernist sensibility. Bengalis performed their “being modern” through claims of rejecting “arranged marriages” and wanting “love and romance” as a basis of their marital relationship. Thus disassociating themselves from appearing to adopt “backward”, “traditional”, and “disempowered”/“disempowering” social practices. Romantic love then became a self-conscious performance (Schein 1999: 368) for Bengalis, forming legitimate foundations of a marriage.

The personal and private act of romantic love between a couple (Giddens 1992) was in certain contexts displayed for others by the second generation Bengalis. Accentuating romantic gestures and affection was a common strategy employed by the second generation entering or entered into a non-self-selecting marriage, thus appearing

¹¹³ Although in Fuller’s and Narasimhan’s study, ‘love marriages’ are not considered an ideal.

“modern”. These “others” included work colleagues, non-Indian friends, Indian friends - especially if they felt that they may “think less,” or “differently” of them if they had an arranged marriage. These second generation who have assisted or arranged marriages may haze over the actual circumstances of the first meeting with their future partner and emphasise emotional bonds between themselves and their partner.

Two examples to illustrate strategies used by the second generation both had parental involvement marriages with partners from India. The first, Akash came to Britain from India as a child, married Nirmala who was born and brought up in India; and the second example, Hema who was born and brought up in Britain, she married Neel who was born and brought up from India. They both had Hindu wedding ceremonies in India followed by a reception for their family friends in Britain. In both these unions I intend to show how they employed strategies to interact with notions of ‘romantic love’ and ‘being modern’.

Hema was in her early twenties, a university graduate who had entered work within the field of IT. Her parents had entered Britain in the late-1960s as skilled professionals. Hema’s mother was a teacher and her father was an engineer. She had grown up with “liberal” parents, who accepted the need for her to have an independent social life with friends of both genders, as well as a social life that she shared with her family and their circle of friends. She attended a private school and was encouraged to go to university without restriction on distance or subject, after graduating from university she entered employment in the City of London.

Since I had known her, she had had several relationships, her relationships at university were usually kept from her parents although her parents sometimes met her boyfriends, who were introduced as one of her friends (in amongst other friends). This narrative begins at the time of her being with Paul. Hema and Paul had gone to university together and had got together towards the end of her final year. At the time Hema was in her early twenties and she often expressed to me her deep feelings of love for Paul. I had met Paul several times, and he was introduced to me as her “boyfriend”. Hema had returned to live at home with her parents after university, until she could afford to buy her own property. She had introduced Paul, as her “friend”, to her parents, but her parents were increasingly aware of her relationship with Paul. Hema then started to

experience a lot of pressure about Paul, whom they accepted as a friend, but increasingly not as a “friend” (i.e. boyfriend).

Hema

They [her parents] were just going on and on about getting married and I had been on a few dates with a few Bengali boys. I just didn't like them. I went out with Bipin, and when he dropped me off home, he tried to kiss me and I just didn't want to. It didn't feel right, he didn't feel right.

You know what people are like, you can't keep going out with different guys, people will say that I am really fussy, and that I want the impossible and that I am stuck up and I'm not, and I don't just want to settle.

I want to be with Paul, I love him so much and we are so happy together. His parents are really lovely, they like me and I like them, I could be so happy with him . . . we have talked about how it was going to work. My parents know that I *like* him and they have been so difficult, they have made my life hell at home, *ma* has been ignoring me, and always interrupting my conversations with Paul on the phone, she has been misunderstanding things even when I have tried to buy her a gift. *Baba* [father] has been shouting at me, saying that he has been ill, and that I have been making him feel even more ill. He said that he would like to see me married before he dies.

Hema's parents were not happy about Paul, as he was not Bengali, Hindu nor Indian and had a physical ailment. Although Paul was from a wealthy, “middle class” family and well-educated, in this particular instance this was not enough to appease her parents. Hema found the animosity with her parents very difficult. She went on a few “dates” with potential suitors while going out with Paul, to placate her parents. Hema then went on an impromptu “holiday” to India with her parents on their insistence. When Hema first came back from India after two weeks, she talked about Neel, her husband-to-be, in romantic terms and said that her relationship with Paul was “not working out”. She came back and broke up with her boyfriend. When I last met them as a couple, they appeared very happy, saying that they were very much in love and wanted to spend their lives together. After returning from India, Hema informed me of her impending marriage with Neel, whom she met in India and how it was a “romantic story”. Initially Hema constructed a love narrative about how the couple had met:

Hema

. . . we fell in love, it happened really, really fast. We met over two weeks and I really liked him and I phoned my aunt to tell her that I liked him. She told me that Neel had phoned her and told her that he liked me. That's when I knew that we had something. I wanted to get married.

We talk on the phone all the time and we write to each other. I can't wait 'til he's here. We have loads in common and I can really talk to him. I have met his family, they are really nice. I can't wait to get married to Neel. . . Paul? Well we broke up, before I went to India, things were not working out.

Hema talked of her relationship with Neel in terms of love and romance, as a way to legitimise her relationship. She also tried to explain her relationship in terms of developing an emotional relationship not only within the two week holiday but sustained and blossoming further through correspondence and then through the phone. Hema from then onwards, refused to engage in any more conversation about Paul. Hema's friends and Bengali family friends, especially those of the second generation responded in surprise by her sudden choice of marriage partner, her relative young age and her "arranged marriage". As she married in her early twenties, through high parental involvement, her Bengali friends expressed surprise that she relented to marrying a man from India. A close second generation family friend of Hema's, Anil, a second generation Bengali, was baffled by her marrying a man from India at the behest of her parents. He had no idea that she was going out with Paul, but her going out with him would not be shocking and certainly less surprising to him than Hema having an arranged marriage.

Anil

Why did she do it? Why did she go to India, I thought that she was modern, she had a mind of her own. Then she went out and got married to some guy she just met, I can't understand it. I have known her my whole life and I didn't ever think that she would do something like this, she is like one of us, and she had an arranged marriage. I always thought that she would have a love marriage.

Misti, another second generation friend of Hema's, expressed her astonishment and annoyance at the situation:

Misti

I really don't understand why her parents have pushed her into all this [marriage], they come across as so easy going and chilled out,

why would they do this? Her dad using the: “Just marry someone before I die” act is really awful. Apart from being clichéd it is unkind to put someone in that awful situation and all that pressure I know that she was given a *choice* [Misti put her fingers up to form air quotations] in her marriage partner, and that the man at the end of the day was fine, but it was this weird push from parents to see their daughter get married . . . I thought Hema was one of us, she let her parents push her into marrying some guy, who could of been anyone, and to be honest he is a lovely guy, but she married so young. My parents just thought that is what . . . she wanted and don’t imagine that the she were strongly coerced into making decisions, which was a “good match” basically that they appear happy, which only reinforces that this was an amicable decisions . . I know that Hema found it hard, and in hindsight, she was younger then, and perhaps that is the art of “encouraging” someone to getting married, is to do it when they are less set in their ways and less likely to stand up for themselves and not yield to parents . . .

Narayan *Mesho*¹¹⁴ [paternal “uncle”] was furious and went over to her [Hema’s] dad and said that he should let her live a bit and that he was not going to force his daughter into marrying at such a young age, he told him that he wanted his daughter to live her life.

I know now that appearances are deceptive, that some parents start to freak out when their daughters and sometimes their sons hit a certain age, but I thought with most [Bengalis] it would be later rather than earlier - sort of mid-twenties rather than early-twenties. I think that her [Hema’s] parents knew about Paul and were desperate for her not to get together with anyone who was not appropriate and he clearly was not appropriate. They made her decide really quickly so she didn’t have a chance to think. So Paul was out of the picture and Hema assumed the role of devoted and obedient daughter, even though she was clearly distressed at their decision, she went along with it, it makes me sad. She then acted as if it was something she had meant to do all the time, she is quite a complex girl, or perhaps it is the situation that is complex . . .

As if to advise me Hema told me about some of her friends’ reaction to her sudden plans to have an “arranged marriage”. Hema said how some of her friends were quite annoyed and shocked by her decision telling her that it was not the right thing for her to do. She said that it had caused rifts with some of her closest friends.

Hema

Some of my friends, especially Anil, said that he just couldn’t understand what I was doing. He was really angry with me, saying

¹¹⁴ Narayan Mesho was Misti’s family friend’s father.

that I was making the wrong decision and that I shouldn't be going into this marriage. He said that I didn't know my own mind anymore, that this is just what my parents wanted and that I was mad for leaving Paul when I was happy. I told him that if he couldn't accept my decision and Neel that I didn't want to know him. I just cut him off.

I never asked her about Paul, and Hema never mentioned him again. However, Hema expressed her happiness with her impending marriage, through expressions of love and romance, which were reinforced by Hema's parents. Although her parents in particular were not concealing their involvement in their daughter's marriage, they talked about the meeting of the future couple in terms of an "introduction", and how the pair had "a real connection". Hema's mother, Tamasi, said of the match:

Tamasi

Hema and Neel hit it off straight away, they liked each other and we liked Neel. He is a nice boy, he is very sweet and his family are lovely too. He will be coming to stay with us at first and then the pair of them will get a place together, once they are settled.

Hema's parents in disclosing to others about the marriage, reiterated that *she* (the bride) had *met him* (the groom) and did not elaborate on the nature of this "chance meeting". It was not unusual for the parent of the second generation to lovingly chastise them for being "love sick", being "constantly on the phone" or being generally preoccupied in front of others, including other Bengali parents. This mock chastising in front of visitors only perhaps reinforced the parent collusion in the relationship, as this would be considered inappropriate for offspring who had self-selecting marriage where overt gestures of romance and love could suggest having a sexual relationship. Where there was a long distance relationship, a sexual relationship could not be asserted. The parental involvement in the arranging of this marriage allowed for the couple to express their love through letters and telephone conversations and for the bride's parents to declare it openly. Indeed it was important to be seen to allow the couple space and agency to express the 'modern'.

Tamasi

Hema is always on the phone to Neel, they are always talking, our bill is going to be extortionate, I have to tell her not to phone so much, especially as they write to each other as well . . . young people these days, what can you do?

Tamasi's description of Hema's impending marriage helped to promote the relationship as "modern" making parental involvement appear incidental and obscured. Even though Hema and her parents had presented Hema's marriage in openly "romantic" terms, de-emphasising parental involvement, both first and second generation Bengalis were fully aware that this was an "arranged marriage". Hema's and her parent's performance of "being modern" through asserting romantic love, did not cloak the formal negotiations of marriage that had occurred. As Hema's husband-to-be was from India and marriage propositions had happened quickly an "arranged marriage" was not in doubt in the minds of her family friends and other friends who knew her well, thus the assertion of romantic intimacy by Hema and her parents was all the more acute

Akash, another second generation person, employed strategies of asserting the romance of his marriage. Akash lived in North-West London, his father was a doctor and his mother, a civil servant. Akash came to Britain as a six year old. He had been educated privately and then went to university to study medicine and qualified as a doctor. Although he had bought property of his own, he was keen to stay at home with his parents as he said that he was very comfortable having an attentive mother who cared for him. Akash's parents had been openly searching for a bride for both their sons, particularly for Akash, the elder of two brothers. Akash was happy for parents to look for a bride for him. He was approaching his mid-thirties and he and his parents felt that the search for a potential bride in Britain was exhausted. They had used family-friend networks to find a potential partner for Akash, he had met up with a few of the potential matches, but either he did not like them, or they did not like him. One day Akash's father told me of a holiday to China that he was taking with his two sons. Many of their family friends were very sceptical of their "holiday" to China, believing that they were actually going to visit India, especially as Akash's parents had been talking about a possibility of searching in India for a possible bride. The suspicions of the Akash's family friends were confirmed when upon their return, the family announced that Akash was to be married a few months later in India and that there would be a reception after the bride-to-be, Nirmala, arrived.

It was quite common for Bengali informants, who went to India to find a potential bride or groom, to talk of their visit in terms of a "holiday", although they did not often go to

the extent of disguising their destination as well as intent to the extent of Akash's father. In part, this concealing of intentions was to avoid teasing and further enquiry by first and second generation Bengalis about finding a potential partner; and more so from non-South Asian "outsiders" to avoid being seen as "desperate", "unromantic" and "traditional". At Akash's wedding reception I overheard him speak to one of his British White university friend, about how he met Nirmala:

Akash

. . . We met while I was in India, visiting friends and family. I saw this beautiful woman [looking towards Nirmala]. We talked and talked, we went out, we talked a lot and we knew, I knew Nirmala was the one for me, I just had to marry her, so here we are.

This concealing or obscuring of arranged marriage was common, and I had witnessed many similar instances, including in Hema's case earlier. Future wives or husbands might be spoken of in terms of "girlfriend", "boyfriend", "fiancé" or "fiancée" and the origins of the meeting may begin to melt into a perceived "norm" in British society of having a love marriage. Other times second generation on having an arranged or assisted marriage sometimes made a point of showing photographs of their intended, telling people about how often they phoned, wrote and increasingly emailed.

A few weeks after their wedding reception, Nirmala and Akash were invited to a second generation Bengali birthday party locally, where many Bengalis were present. The house party was hosted by Bengali family friends of Akash. I was already there when Akash arrived. The house party was attended entirely by second generation Bengali youth, and a few non-Bengali friends. The house party was contained downstairs with the darkened living with lighting and DJ reserved for dancing and the dining room for food and chat (which extended into the corridors) where there was a vast selection of Indian finger food and substantial starters, prepared by the parents of the birthday boy, drinks, alcohol and non-alcoholic were laid out for the guests. A few of the boys were outside smoking in the garden.

Akash and Nirmala entered hand in hand, clearly very happy, Nirmala dressed in a *salawar*, Akash in a shirt and a pair of trousers. They mingled with a few of the other guests and within the hour sat in the corner of the dimmed living room and began to kiss

and caress. This was regarded as unusual at Bengali parties, and there were many guests looking quizzically at the married couple, who appeared oblivious to the exchanged glances of others. Rajani, a second generation unmarried woman in her mid-twenties, recalled her reactions at the time:

Rajani

God, do you remember Akash and his wife and when they came to Joy's 18th birthday party, they were snogging like a couple of teenagers, yuck! [Laughing] Do we really need to see that kind of behaviour at a party? He was in his thirties for God' sake, we really didn't need to see that. I don't know. He was married to her for God sake he didn't really need to show us what he could do. Go get a room!

I think he was doing it because he wanted everyone to know that he and his wife were pretty normal in that department, he might have had an arranged marriage but the love was flowing, if you know what I mean.

While Rajani expressed her distaste in Akash's and Nirmala's behaviour, there appeared to me a genuine expression of feeling between Akash and Nirmala. Their behaviour was markedly different from other second British Indian Bengalis, who tended to be less likely to feel the need to display these levels of intimacy with their partners. Although married their expression of love and togetherness surprised me initially. Akash's behaviour in particular seemed to suggest that he was trying to gain a "modern" respectability by being so openly affectionate, thus deflecting his high levels of parental involvement with his marriage to Nirmala. This affection appeared to be a part of their development of their relationship and only displayed in this specific context. I did not witness further displays of *intense* affections in other *Bengali* contexts where I was present, for example at family parties, *pujas*, etc. where it would be regarded as completely inappropriate by both first and second generation. However, at these events they were often physically close to one another, Akash sometimes put his arm around her shoulders, and they sometimes caught each other's eyes and smiled fondly at each other. Akash and Nirmala as a married couple felt free to show gentle affection and romantic love in the presence of others. A couple may even be teased for their affection, particularly by first generation, including their own parents.

For Hema, it is important to demonstrate a degree of agency over her lifecourse, rather than following a sequence of ascribed steps or reflecting in social practice ideologies, that have been absorbed through the media. In compliance with her parents' wishes to find an "appropriate" groom, the couple articulated their relationship through emotional expressions by means of writing and telephoning in private, in developing their relationship in their own terms, although in the context of a long distance relationship. Hema's parents colluded in the presentation of her relationship of expressions of love and romance. Parents themselves were also presenting themselves as "modern" and "liberal" by accepting pre-marital expressions of love and romance between the couple.

Likewise Akash and Nirmala after marriage were able to demonstrate a romantic relationship through expressions of physical affections both subtle and more overt. Akash in narrating the way the pair had met created a pre-marital intimacy which he attempted to reflect in their post-marital relationship. While both relationships had parental involvement, they still showed how intimacy could flourish in more public arenas in front of family friend networks both before and after marriage, expressing "being modern" within 'arranged marriages'. A disparity between how marriage was spoken of and the involvement of parents goes some way to show the anxiety of being interpreted as "traditional" and "backward". Thus, where there was parental involvement in the inception of a marriage, it was sometimes eclipsed to align oneself and one's family as "modern".

Of the 82 second generation that I spoke to, all expressed a desire to find love regardless of the type of marriage they had. "Arranged marriages" and "love marriages" could be blurred, obscured or formulated interchangeably, making the differences between "arranged" and "love" more ambiguous. Marital unions, regardless of whether they were self-selecting or with parental involvement, took part in the same (most often Hindu) rituals making them indistinguishable in appearance, aside from physical differences of their partner such as not looking Indian or the wearing a turban.

The marriage of Rekha and Rajat illustrates how romantic love can have multiple and interchangeable understandings and presentations. The bride's parents carefully manoeuvred the presentation of their daughter's marriage to adapt contextually and situationally, moving between "love" and "arranged"/ "assisted" to accommodate

different audiences. To assert a relationship as “arranged” or “assisted” as was the case here perhaps reiterated how self-selective marriages were not seen as the exclusive possessors’ of romantic love.

Rekha was a British-born, Indian Bengali second generation woman in her mid-twenties. She was considered beautiful, privately educated, a university graduate who had studied dentistry. Her father was a doctor and her mother was a university graduate who preferred to be a housewife. Rekha met Rajat, a second generation Bengali man in his late twenties, at a Bengali function at which I was present. They introduced themselves to each other and to other new faces. At the time of their first meeting, Rekha had a relationship with her Gujarati boyfriend, Hiresh, and they were intending to be married. Her parents had begun to mention Rekha’s impending marriage to Hiresh to a few of their family friends and this information had filtered out to the wider community of Bengalis. However, as the months advanced her relationship with Hiresh deteriorated as Rekha felt increasingly that Hiresh was not what she wanted:

Rekha

I don’t know what to do, I am thinking that Hiresh is not really the one. You know all the dancing, singing and plays we have been doing, he has not come to one of those events, not one. You’d think that he could come and see me, just once. I am so fed up with it. He is not really talking about marriage, it’s me. I don’t think I want to be with him. He doesn’t seem to be interested in our culture, not just the Bengali culture but Indian culture, and that is so important to me, he takes no interest at all, not even in his own [Gujarati]! I mean oh my god, we have all this culture and he doesn’t want to be involved. I don’t think I want to be with him. I am not happy anymore, we’re not seeing each other as much as we used to and I am just going to break it off with him, I’ve had enough.

Two weeks after she broke up with Hiresh, Rekha began to talk about Rajat as a potential love interest, talking about his personal qualities, they had become close friends over the course of a few months. Rajat also appeared very interested in the beautiful Rekha who created opportunities to be alone with him and the two became increasingly flirtatious with each other:

Rekha

He is so thoughtful, I have seen the way he is with his sister, so sweet and caring, thinking of others before himself. I really like him. He is so sweet. . . .

They finally expressed their feelings for each other at Rajat's party at his home, where in a drunken state Rekha expressed her feelings for Rajat, and Rajat for her, and then she also expressed feelings for his friend and said she was thinking about it. Rajat, was very confused, and he spoke to me a little drunk, after Rekha fell asleep soon after. Rajat and I spoke on the steps. I was also a little worse for having indulged in a couple of drinking competitions earlier that evening:

Rajat: I hope she means it [liking him].
 Anusree: Yes she does, she told me.
 Rajat: She wasn't very clear, she started saying she was deciding between me and Tarun, I think that I might forget it!
 Anusree: Oh don't do that, why not speak to her in the morning when you both have clear heads, you know she is a light weight [drinker]. Or maybe you could speak to her in the afternoon when she's a little more sorted. I'm pretty sure she will be really embarrassed that she said that.
 Rajat: Mmmh. You know I have my pride you know.
 Anusree: You know people when they're drunk they say things all sorts of things. Talk to her in the morning.
 Rajat: Mmmh.

I left mid-morning after breakfast to go home and have a shower, giving Rajat a squeeze on the arm for luck. Rekha was still asleep. We were all to meet later at the Camden *puja*, Rekha was going to give me a lift. Later that evening I saw Rekha beaming at me, in her pink silk sari looking lovely, unable to contain her smiles. I sat at the front and as we whizzed through the streets in North East London, she told me how Rajat and she had had a "heart to heart" and that the pair of them were going to see each other and see what developed after that. She also told Rajat about Hires and he told her about his previous long term partner. They admitted that they had feelings for one another. Rekha was excited about the prospect of starting this new relationship.

Rekha and Rajat started seeing each other and became very close and within two weeks the pair had secretly moved in together. The couple openly established their relationship to their parents although concealing their living arrangements. Their romantic expressions were readily accepted by both sets of parents. Six weeks later the couple announced that they were engaged. Both sets of parents were ecstatic with their

children's decision and a flurry of engagement parties and *aashirwads* (Bengali engagement ceremony) ensued. Rekha's parents, however, in announcing their daughter's impending wedding had described Rekha's marriage to Rajat in terms of an assisted/arranged marriage to a few of the first generation Bengalis. Rekha's parents did this in the absence of Rekha and Rajat themselves. A first generation uncle recounted to me how the couple met, even though I was present when the couple met within a large group and met subsequently.

- Ranjit: They met through the British Bengali Association; they were introduced by their parents. They came and told us last week, they are getting married and how they had set them up together. It was arranged by her parents. It is a good match.
- Me: Pardon?
- Ranjit: Yes Rekha's parents told us that they were introduced to each other.
- Me: Really? I thought that they . . . well met on their own.
- Ranjit: No, it was arranged by their parents, they told me themselves.
- Me: Oh.

It initially struck me as a very odd thing for them to have done, as Rekha's and Rajat's relationship would be welcomed and celebrated as a very good match by the first generation regardless of whether the pair had met through self-selection or parental involvement. I never asked Rekha's parents directly about why they had decided to take this route as they had not done so with their son when he met his Bengali wife. I can only deduce that as many Bengalis were aware of Rekha's recent impending marriage with Hiresh and her sudden "change of heart" to marry Rajat, that her parents wanted to give their daughter another type of "respectability", protection against fickleness. Trying to acquire this "respectability" I suspected was a strategy to screen-off her change of potential marriage partner which were both initiated by her. While they were not concealing the matter that Rekha and Rajat had "fallen in love", they were attempting to adjoin their added perceived prestige to the match in this particular context. Rekha and Rajat, like the earlier couples in this chapter, have tried to encompass both "cultural" and "modern" practices. While romantic love was an accepted part of "modern" respectability, there was also the fear of appearing to go too far. This was an opinion not shared by Rekha in particular, who was perplexed and angered by many people's assumption that her relationship with Rajat was "arranged". She had always expressed to me her ease with meeting people through an assisted route

or “love” but said that people were under the misconception that she had met Rajat through the British Bengali Association.

Rekha

I really get annoyed when people think that we had an arranged marriage and that we were some how set up, that’s not true. We got to know each other as friends outside of all that. I wish that people would not say that we met in any other way. We met on our own terms, while we did first met at a Bengali do, it was in a big group, we weren’t introduced specifically. We got to know each other outside of that. Nothing to do with anyone else.

I was unable to build up the courage to tell Rekha myself about her parent’s contributing or perhaps instigating rumours that Rekha’s marriage to Rajat was initiated by her parents, in fear of causing conflict between her parents and herself. As Rekha’s and Rajat’s engagement approached there was a mixture of ceremonies and parties. There was an engagement party aimed at all the bride’s and groom’s friends, followed by two *aashirwads* (pre-marital blessings), one in London held by her parents and the other in Kent, Surrey held by Rajat’s parents’, where Rajat’s parents lived. This was followed by several invitations to have an *ey buro baath*¹¹⁵. I attended most of these and found that it would be difficult on the surface to ascertain how romantic attachments were initiated between the couple. What was emphasised was the couple were happy as were the parents: a companionate marriage, ‘a bond between two intimate selves’, as Parry (2001: 816) describes.

The bride and groom, however, were able to take cultural cues from each other and their parents as to the “expected” behaviour. Rekha particularly assumed the position of the dutiful daughter-in-law, singing in Bengali to Rajat’s family friends, calling her mother-in-law, “Ma”, being extremely attentive and compliant to her mother-in-law’s wishes. On the day of her *aashirwad* she was a little unhappy with a sari her mother-in-law had given her, as it was not to her taste; however, she felt compelled to wear it to please her mother-in-law:

Rekha

¹¹⁵ A wedding feast in honour of the bride held by friends and/or family, signifying their approval of the impending marriage and also affection towards the bride. These are usually held in friend’s homes who invite the bride and sometimes also the groom, to eat numerous dishes and usually given a gift of a sari.

Can you see what I mean [placing her sari on the bed]? It is really too gaudy for me, you know what I like. But I have to, she bought it specially, I wished I had chosen it with her. She [her mother-in-law to be] said that I have to wear more make up as well, because she said in the last *aashirwad* I wasn't wearing enough, I don't feel comfortable wearing too much. I'll just put on a bit more [make up] but I don't want to go out looking like a whore!

Donner observes in her study of marriages in Calcutta that most women agreed that the best approach to 'love marriage' is to 'treat them as if they were arranged marriages' (2002: 88). This was varied in the British context, while the marriage was 'normalised' as appropriately described by Donner (2008: 88), it was not necessarily transformed into an "arranged marriage" but a series of negotiations between both sets of parents and the couple themselves, transforming the marriage into an acceptable *Bengali* union. Bengali rituals of blessings such as *aashirwads*; *ey buro baath*; *gaya halood* (smearing of turmeric over the body of the bride and groom before the wedding)¹¹⁶ were still a major part of most British Indian Bengali wedding preparations. However, the love aspect was an important one. While staying in Kent for one of the *aashirwads*, the fathers of the bride and groom were discussing how pleased they were with the marital union of their children. They spoke after the engagement at the groom's home, which I was I fortuitously privy to as I was coming down the stairs, and the conversation continued, as I sat there quietly listening:

- Nitin: We'll show them in Kolkata that these two young people can fall in love with the right person - another Bengali.
- Hemant: This is something that they can all see. They made such a very good decision, *all on their own*, especially in these times.
- Nitin: Yes. We will show Kolkata that two people can fall in love and fall in love with the right person. This is something they could all see.
- Hemant: This marriage is about uniting two individuals who by choice, chose to marry their own kind and was a good example to the community. And that this was a choice that the two made on their own.
- Nitin: We have such a good match with our children, look, here we are the two of us, we could have put this together ourselves, but they did it on their own. They will be so amazed in India to see how our children can go out and find a correct choice for themselves.

Nitin, who had earlier colluded with his wife to tell a few first generation people that they had assisted their daughter in finding Rajat, was now jubilantly expressing how

¹¹⁶ These are held separately, usually at the home of the respective bride and groom.

Rekha and Rajat had found each other through self-selection, in front of me, two “uncles” and an “aunty”. Nitin felt comfortable to express his happiness and pride of how his off-spring could be trusted to make a “good decision” about marriage which was consistent with his own belief and preferences, making the “right” decision. However, Rekha had very nearly married Hires, who was not Bengali or wealthy, but a Hindu Brahmin (as I recalled Mita, Rekha’s mother had informed me). Likewise although Rajat had not proposed to marry anyone, he was in a five year relationship with a non-Indian girl. The fathers had elevated this marriage into an ideal, suggesting an “appropriate” choice yet within a “modern” context of romantic love and agency, in their eyes, their offspring sought to counterbalance the “modern” with their decision of marrying a very “appropriate” choice that could have been arranged by parents.

With all three couples, how their relationships were communicated (by both or one of the couple, their parents and friends) reflected the contradictions, anxieties and pressures of having a “Westernised”, “modernist”, but also kin-centred or perhaps more accurately a kin-sensitive relationship. I have interpreted these relationships in terms of their implementation of “being modern” and individual agency yet *responsible* choices of partner. Individuals and others outside of the couple were performing or portraying the position of the couple through strategic concealing or revealing of information to assert “being modern” or within specific contexts and/or aspects of a relationship. However, romantic love was seen as an acceptable and indeed a requirement of marriage.

Conclusion

A “modern” marriage for the second generation was increasingly not held in the type of marriage a couple had alone (i.e. parental involvement: “arranged” or “assisted”; or self-selecting: “love”). Strategies of manoeuvring towards “being modern” within an “arranged” or “assisted” marriage through the component of romantic love was not considered a contradiction. Whilst the timing of love and romance could vary from self-selecting marriages and relationships; the strategies communicating “love” were vital in the presentation of a marriage and a departure from first generation marriages where “love” before marriages was considered more challenging at the time. There was a growing trend towards self-selecting marriages; of those who have varying levels of

parental involvement there are strategies often used to ‘normalise’ their relations in terms of romantic love, such as reference to their bride-to-be in terms of “girlfriend”, which worked also to conceal the “arrangement” element of the relationship, particularly to “outsiders” or anyone deemed possibly critical of an arranged or assisted marriage. Therefore parental involvement necessitated the need to assert romance, love and notions of “being modern” within the marriage or proposed marriage, particularly to other second generation and wider circle of friends.

It was also a way to show British White, British Indian Bengalis and other ethnic groups that they were not bound by ethnic social practices but able to transcend ethnic signifiers; which were perceived as “antiquated” cultural customs and values. Romantic love had therefore entered into the formation of identity markers of the collective self for the second generation and by association and acceptance also the first generation. This association of romantic love was imagined to be particularly “modern” by Bengalis where, as Giddens describes, ‘expert’ structures replace kinship trust relationships (1990: 121-2). What Giddens (1992) emphasises is the means by which post-traditional relationships encompass a personalising of the private sphere of intimacy. Giddens’ observation reveals a pervasive notion that ‘modernity’ has brought about a proliferation of autonomous lifestyle choices and sexual pluralism. Certainly there were a high number of “love marriages”, but as I have tried demonstrate, love was not just established through “modern” individualism, love could be expressed and demonstrated within marriages where there was parental involvement.

Rachel Dwyer makes the observation of a “new middle-class utopia” in India which wants to be defined “for the enjoyment of love, wealth and equality” (2000: 13), a sentiment shared by British Indian Bengalis. Love and romance was rarely implied or explicitly described in terms of deviancy or disapproved in principle as was the case in the past, as with Vatuk’s study (1972: 87) in the 1970s. (However, open sexual relations outside of marriage were more difficult.) Love had become a measure of middle class, “modern” respectability for the second generation. Second generation Bengalis, regardless of whether their marriage was self-selecting or parentally assisted were keen to express love as a part of their sense of middle class “modern” respectability. How a marriage or relationship was presented was dependent on individual’s circumstances: whose company they were in; the manner in which the

couple met; who their potential partner was and the individual and couple themselves. The second generation's particular experiences helped inform the complexities of a relationship, the role that romantic love played in defining a marriage as "modern", the relevance of family and alternative modernities.

. . . expressions of romantic love are not necessarily a predictable component of other apparently 'modern' activities, institutions, or developments. It is more accurate to say that individuals and societies are in a state of flux, and that intimacy and love transform in relation to other forms of expression, including those which are economic and ideological. (Hart 2007: 351)

Romantic love was not confined only to those who had "love marriages" but was a resource that any couple, individual or parent was able to draw on or present as a "modern" relationship. Romance was a self-conscious strategy and a legitimate foundation of marriage, emerging under particular historical, economic and social conditions (Ahearn 2001; Collier 1997; Duben & Behar 1991; Rebhun 1999; Yan 2003). Romantic love was not a predicable aspect with a specific route; it could be used to transform a relationship and individuals into the "modern".

The following chapter will look at how many of these self-selecting marriages were reflecting class considerations over ascribed statuses.

Chapter 7

Marriage Selection

[People] love those who are like themselves (Aristotle 1934: 1371).

“Love”, as discussed in the previous chapter, was a strong criterion for the second generation when looking for a marriage partner. However, “love” did not operate randomly (Bourdieu 1990). Marital selection was often related to finding a “respectable” and acceptable partner with similar assets to oneself. South Asian diasporic literature presents these similar assets, as mainly endogamous based (Mand 2008; Maira 2002; Dwyer, C. 2000; Bradby 1999; Prinja 1999; Jhutti 1998; Gillespie 1995) on caste, regional-language, ethnicity and religion. Where it included criterion such as class and education, it was often in *addition* to endogamy (Raj 2003)¹¹⁷. One major drawback of these accounts was the assumption that endogamy was always the dominant identity marker. This chapter intends to challenge the assertion that *all* South Asians are *primarily* driven by ethnicity, religion and regional-language markers in their search for a partner. British Indian Bengali second generation were looking for respectable “modern” partners, where the content of respectability - the criteria sought after - was increasingly moving away from caste, ethnic and religious considerations.

England and Farkas (1986) liken marital selection to terms of job selection, where a person searches for a marital partner in a marriage market rather than a job in a labour market. Birkelund and Heldal establish two critical features of marital selection; firstly that marital selection is connected to the *preferences* of individuals, who are perceived as agents who try to ‘maximise (or satisfy) their future family income and social status by searching for what they regard as the most attractive partner’ (2003: 3). Secondly Birkelund and Heldal argue that:

. . . marital selection is related to and constrained by the opportunity structure, the *marriage market*. The structure of the marriage market influences the chances of individuals to realise

¹¹⁷ See Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) for example of this in India.

their preferences. Marriage markets can be defined in terms of the overall demographic composition of the population as a whole, or in a more local fashion, such as educational institutions, workplaces, etc. (England and Farkas 1986; Mare 1991; Blossfeld, Timm and Dasko 1998, Dagsvik 2000). (Birkelund and Heldal, 2003: 3)

The structure of the second generation marriage market was intertwined with the politics of identity, which was a constant undercurrent to how the Bengalis imagined the framework of their cultural practices, positioning themselves as being “modern” and “enlightened” as opposed to “traditional”. However, caste considerations, ethnic and religious hierarchies and pressures to marry although significantly decreasing, were not uncommon amongst the Bengalis. Bengalis while accepting “modern” marital processes such as “love marriages” were more concerned with what Donner (1999) terms “configurations” of marriage, which alludes to the endogamy/exogamy criteria.

This chapter intends to examine the marital selection of the second generation and the influences, criteria and consequences by which partners were selected. This chapter also looks at the impact of first generation parents’ proclamations of “being modern” and how this has propelled them into accepting the second generation’s marital choice which has extended beyond their ethnic, regional-language and religious group. Second generation’s romantic attachments and marital choices however, were not always well received by their “modern” parents. The disparity between what I was told about acceptance of romantic love and approval of a self-selecting relationship was dependent on the *choice of marriage partner* made. With self-selecting marriages if the acceptable criteria of regional-language, religion, ethnic origin, standing of one’s *ghar* [household], class and marital status were not met, they were more open to potential criticism or disapproval. Much was dependent on the first generation parents’ willingness to accept a possible match, and the offspring’s determination to marrying their partner. Proximity in status between the second generation and their potential partner decreased parental protestation (Vatuk 1972: 86ff; Debi 1988: 61; and Donner 1999: 128). Where a second generation individual found a non-Indian Bengali marital partner, the second generation offspring would strategically attempt to draw similarities in cultural and socioeconomic resources between themselves as Indian Bengalis and the particular characteristics of their partner. If successful the first generation parents would then collude to reconfigure, challenge and negotiate their offspring’s choice of marital partner,

reflecting the changing role of parental influence. Together both generations adopted various strategies to negotiate their status. Kalmijn (1998) identifies three social forces which influence marriage patterns: ‘the preferences of individuals for resources in a partner, the influence of the social group, and the constraints of the marriage market’. Kalmijn also allows for the influence of ‘third-party control’ which for the second generation could potentially be their first generation parents.

Parental influence

Having parental support for spouse selection was a widespread concern (Goode 1959). Prinja (1999: 112-115) argues that educated and professional second generation’s independence was merely ‘putative’. Prinja describes second generation British Gujaratis as wanting their parents’ approval of their marriage and continuing social, psychological and emotional support from them (1999: 112-115). Additionally, Brah’s portrayal of the effect of a high concentration of South Asian residences and services showed how they acted as monitors of behaviour, ‘maintaining continuity of cultural norms’ (Brah 1978: 198). Parental duty was not reflective of the second generation experience.

For Bengalis, who were relatively spread out geographically, often living away from concentrations of South Asians (especially other Bengalis), there was much lower ‘force’ in preserving ‘continuity of cultural norms’. While second generation Bengalis hoped for parental support, it was not divorced from *their* own wishes and desires. Prinja (1999: 113) and C. Ballard (1979: 128) note that ‘loyalty’ to family can be reinforced by racism and rejection elsewhere further encouraging the seeking of parental support. These ‘emotional investments’ extended outside of the family into the ‘community’, where there was a fear of ostracism increased parental approval. The second generation of Bengalis in this study have a growing ambivalence towards parental involvement in their relationships – they see them as being potentially intrusive.

Many second generation Bengalis did not go through with “arranged marriages” (with 66 per cent of my sample of second generation having self-selecting marriages) and did not necessarily marry within caste, regional-language, ethnic group or religious groups,

moving away from Brah's (1978: 200) 30 years old research where informants accepted heavy parental involvement in their marriages regardless of their own wishes to explore alternatives. While parental opinions and support in spouse selection was a significant concern, the first generation themselves were not resolute in their expectations of their children in marriage. Cultural resources rather than a point of 'conflict' (Kalmijn 1991: 501-505) were a source of negotiation between the generations. Notions of "being modern" were not restricted to the second generation but shared with the first generation. It was important to note that the first generation were also in a process of constructing meaning and developing practices in response to their positions within the life course (Gardner 2002).

The first generation came to a realisation that their offspring could not be "forced" into making a decision to marry a specific person or increasingly, a spouse of a particular social origin. There was a real chance of divorce if there was unhappiness within second generation marriages. First generation wishes for *happiness* in their offspring's marriage, together with dating strategies employed by the second generation discouraged heavy handed tactics and allayed fears of difference of their offspring's spouses. The first generation were usually familiar with the potential spouse, even if they were previously seen as just a platonic friend. Most of the second generation being financially independent and often living away from home reduced parental financial leverage over their children's decisions.

Ultimately, the second generation looked for their parents' blessing and support rather than their *approval*. Often first generation were "blessing" a relationship which had been negotiated to some extent with parents over a course of many months or years. If not the intention, certainly the consequence of introducing a boyfriend or girlfriend prior to proposing marriage meant that there had been a process of familiarity if not amicability that had grown between Bengali parents and the potential future son or daughter-in-law.¹¹⁸ This route of finding a spouse had significantly reduced the role of parents, the second generation for the most part were much more confident in their own decisions of entering into self-selecting marriages. Strategies employed by many of the

¹¹⁸ For those who have had low to high parental involvement in spouse selection, personal happiness and the development of romantic love has had an influential bearing on how spouse selection progresses and the approaches to introductions and meetings (as discussed in the *Respectability and Love* chapter).

second generation during the period of dating were vital in establishing the relationship in the minds of parents, even if this was initially as a platonic friendship or “friendship”¹¹⁹.

Marriage Trends

Academics writing about South Asian marital selection have tended to describe marriage trends based on endogamous traits of caste, regional-language, ethnicity and religion (Mand 2008; Maira 2002; Dwyer, C. 2000; Bradby 1999; Prinja 1999; Jhutti 1998; Gillespie 1995). These criteria, also called ascribed status, for British Indian Bengalis potentially included categories of sub-caste, caste, regional-language group, ethnicity and religion. There were however, other considerations that were also valued, that of education, occupation and other cultural resources such as values, norms, lifestyles, leisure activities, taste, intellectual erudition, styles of speech, life experiences and worldviews. All statuses could not be understood as independent variants: they could be fused, overlapped and adapted in their expression, presentation and performance.

Epstein and Guttman (1984) stated that parity of status attributes within marriage selection existed on a wide range of characteristics such as intelligence; values; attitudes; deafness; personality characteristics; social origins; religion; race; ethnicity; occupation; and education. Birkelund and Heldal (2003: 2) also include regional, demographic or social dispersion as criteria. Kalmijn (1991: 501) clarifies that these matching patterns could be understood in terms of preferences individuals had for similarity in cultural as well as socioeconomic resources. Similarities in cultural resources were linked to cultural backgrounds which increased the likelihood of sharing and confirming one another’s behaviour, worldview and mutual understanding (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985).

¹¹⁹ There is an important distinction between friendship and “friendship” placed in quotation marks, the quotations suggests either a relationship that is silently acknowledged by parents and even to family friends that there is a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. The alternative interpretation is that a relationship is acknowledged as a platonic relationship but in reality is a romantic or sexual relationship.

To describe marriage trends amongst the second generation British Indian Bengalis and the various measures that have been used, it would be helpful to consider the following table.

Table 2: Marriage patterns of second generation respondents in 2000s

Married second generation British Indian Bengalis	Men (30)	Women (29)	Total (59)
Marrying within caste	7 (23 %)	8 (28 %)	15 (25 %)
Marrying outside of caste	23 (77 %)	21 (72 %)	44 (75 %)
Consideration of <i>ghar</i> ¹²⁰ coincided with the number of marriages with parental involvement	14 (47 %)	6 (21 %)	20 (34 %)
Marrying Bengalis	18 (60 %)	12 (41 %)	30 (51 %)
Marry non-Bengalis	12 (40 %)	17 (59 %)	29 (49 %)
Intra-ethnic marriages (i.e. Indians including Bengalis)	20 (67 %)	23 (79 %)	43 (73 %)
Marrying Indians (but not Bengali)	2 (7 %)	13 (38 %)	15 (25%)
Inter-ethnic marriages (i.e. non-Indians)	10 (33 %)	6 (21 %)	16 (27 %)
Inter-religious marriages	14 (47 %)	8 (28 %)	22 (37 %)
Intra-religious marriages	16 (53 %)	21 (72 %)	37 (63 %)
Marrying Muslims	2 (7 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (3 %)
<i>Sharing educational parity</i> ¹²¹	30 (100 %)	28 (97 %)	58 (98 %)

Caste

The caste system is heavily linked with occupation, as a mode of social stratification in India. The hierarchy is organised into hereditary occupations and rules surrounding in-marrying, lifestyle, and a hierarchy of values placed on a continuum of purity and pollution. Social mobility was restricted. The castes split the population into four main classifications of *Brahmins* (priestly caste), the *Kayasthas* (warrior/administration caste), the *Vaisya* (traders and artisan caste), and *Sudra* (agricultural labourers). Within these four groups, there are thousands of sub-castes or *jatis* across various regions. The “untouchable” caste is outside of the caste system. The post-Independence Indian constitution attempted to give freedom of choice of occupations, to encourage a “casteless society” but with regard to marriage, there was a wider adherence to purity-

¹²⁰ *The literal translation of ghar means household or dwelling. In regards to marriage it is an assessment of someone’s relative prestige, status, wealth, living conditions and the reputation within the locality (Fruzzetti 1982: 34-36).*

¹²¹ Educational parity was measured as sharing or not sharing university education. Discrepancy between couples was allowed here for instance where only one member of a couple has a post-graduate degree and the other a a university degree.

pollution matters. Indeed there have been examples of expansion of sub-caste categories of previously separate caste entities of equivalent status (see cases in Vatuk 1982; Kolenda 1978; 151; Srinivas 1977: 233; Mandelbaum 1970: 2, 653; and to a limited degree Fuller and Narasimhan's Vattimas (2007)).

Srinivas (1977) describes a widening endogamous boundaries amongst 'progressive' middle class south Indian Brahmins where sub-castes merged into a 'single entity'. This widening of endogamous boundaries which were considered amongst even small sub-castes of Vattimas (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007) as less preferable to marrying within their own sub-castes, was a nuance not unknown amongst the first generation Bengalis (see also Fruzzetti 1982). However, restricting marriages to sub-castes was seen as restrictive and unrealistic in marriage by both generations. (Although, many second generation marriages in the early 1980s with high parental involvement were more likely to have followed caste and even sub-caste endogamy.¹²²) The younger second generation of marriageable age in the 1990s and 2000s were extremely vocal and assertive in their expectations of their potential spouse; caste requirements, especially where there was self-selection was given very little weight if at all by the second generation. The first generation of British Indian Bengalis, in contrast to Khandelwal's (2002) first generation, in New York, did not impress upon their offspring the importance of marrying within one's caste-group and at the very least within their regional group (152).

Marrying within caste amongst second generation Bengalis, as *Table 1* shows, was relatively low at 25 per cent, the vast majority of caste endogamous marriages corresponded with marriages where there were high or low levels of parental involvement. Of my 12 second generation *Hindu*¹²³ informants, 10 entered into caste endogamous marriages (83 per cent of marriages where there was parental assistance). In comparison to the second generation who had self-selecting marriages, 5 out of 39 second generation (17 per cent) had caste endogamous marriages. Caste endogamy was not being reproduced in large numbers amongst *all* second generation Bengalis

¹²² Which amongst my informants would have all taken part in India with involvement from kin in India.

¹²³ The remaining thirty-seven per cent were Christians. Christian Bengali families in regards to marriages where there was parental involvement were more flexible in accepting potential brides and grooms usually extending to Hindus and other castes, but usually keeping to within the realms of higher castes. There was even a marriage with heavy parental involvement of a Christian British Indian Bengali man marrying to a Hindustani Christian bride from India.

respondents, only 25 per cent married members of the same caste. Notably, there was a disparity amongst the genders. Whilst all the second generation women, who had marriages where there was high parental involvement, shared their caste with their husbands, this was less likely amongst the male respondents, with 23 per cent of men who had had parental involvement, not sharing their caste with their wives. Men who had high parental involvement, had less emphasis on caste endogamy, although all brides were within the top tiers of caste. If the first generation were involved with the arranging of their offspring's marriage, the partner was more likely to share caste status. The first generation tended to follow the rules of traditional Hindu marriage that allowed for across-caste marriages between males of higher sub-castes and females of lower castes, although the opposite, hypogamy, was not as desirable a step (Rao and Rao 1982; Avasthi 1979).

However, with Bengalis', especially women's, increasing move away from high parental involvement in marriage, caste endogamy was losing its influence within second generation spouse selection. As B  teille's reflects, caste consideration while not ignored in India amongst the urban middle class, were entering an ambiguous phase and caste endogamy and boundaries were weakening (1996: 162-6). B  teille argued that membership of caste or sub-caste did not have the same meaning for all individuals (1997: 160), especially in regards to occupation, caste has lessened in vigour. New criteria of status distinctions have developed along with different 'strategies of exclusions' (174). Holmstrom (2007: 32-33) questions whether class was 'replacing' caste, he argued that it rested on a confusion between the people's own categories and outsiders' comparative categories, except to the extent that indigenous concepts were emerging, more like Western uses of 'class' and seen as an alternative to 'caste'. Caste, Holmstrom points out was increasingly a less reliable way of coding due to the wide range of new occupations and class differences. However, B  teille notes that while in India caste is losing its influence, caste has yet to lose its dominance in the realms of marriage and social exclusiveness:

More common perhaps is the man who declares himself passionately against caste in every form, but nonetheless opposes strenuously the marriage of his children outside his caste. (B  teille 1997: 163)

Padagaonkar (1993) and Kannan (1963: vii) note that inter-caste marriage was diminishing in import, but Béteille draws attention to the vagueness of what constituted an inter-caste marriage, which could extend from 'sub-sub-caste to sub-caste, and then to caste' (1997: 164). However, Béteille did not exclude the possibility that there was a loosening of restriction, where other factors were taken into account such as 'good family,' 'cultured family' and 'status family' he warns however that caste was rarely overlooked (1997: 165-175).

While it would be impossible to say if caste had disappeared in Britain amongst second generation British Indian Bengalis, there were low numbers of caste endogamous marriages, expressions of lack of relevance in their day-to-day lives and the first generation's acceptance of their offspring's inter-caste (and indeed inter-religious and inter-ethnic marriages). Significantly, when the first generation were searching for a potential spouse for their offspring in India, they were more caste conscious; however they did not cast the same net of restrictions of endogamy within the British context. Several of my informants' parents (and first generation informants themselves), when searching for a bride or groom for their offspring in Britain, were keen to find an *Indian Bengali*, where specificities of caste were a secondary and an unrealistic expectation.

Béteille's observation that caste was losing its potency (1996: 162-6) has great pertinence to the case of Indian Bengalis in Britain. This weakening would perhaps claim its origins in the way that first generation of Bengalis organised themselves on their arrival to Britain. The first generation did not have the proliferation of caste associations that Michaelson (1979, 1983), Shah (1979), Tambs-Lyche (1980), Prinja (1999) and Morris (1968: 105) write about, when they first arrived to Britain or at any time after. This was consistent with how Bengali caste was organised in present-day Calcutta which manifests itself mainly within the domain of kinship (Donner 1999: 146)¹²⁴. As most first generation arrived without extended kin, caste became displaced by the stronger preoccupation of class, where Bengali friends and social networks were not caste exclusive but were increasingly class exclusive. The lack of polarisation between the castes amongst first generation further removed caste as a significant distinction for second generation as a bench-marking system. Although admittedly the

¹²⁴ Caste organisation whilst popular in nineteenth century Bengal were no longer organised in this way.

majority of first generation Indian Bengalis that migrated to Britain tended to be mostly from the higher caste groups.

Baumann (1996) described how the term ‘community’ was used in a variety of contexts, including caste based associations. Bengalis, although aware of caste status, did not refer to their own caste groups in terms of a ‘community’. Bengali organisations, created by the first generation, were built regionally, religiously, professionally (especially through medical reunions), through drama and “culture and arts”, etc. This lack of caste associations or a caste ‘community,’ has gradually worked to erode the significance of caste for the second generation of Bengalis. Caste had therefore become too abstract an issue for the second generation, reflected in second generation’s reduced likelihood of being aware of subtle distinctions amongst sub-caste for the second generation, unlike Prinja’s Hindu Gujaratis who resided in Brent, (1999: 184-228); although the first generation were able to make these finer differentiations.¹²⁵ Fellow second generation Bengalis of all castes were seen to share similar backgrounds, education, language, “culture” and food.

“Modern” respectability acted as a powerful and well-situated vessel in which to maintain status in marriage that were increasingly falling outside of caste, language, ethnic and religious endogamy. “Being modern” required Bengalis to engage with values of “liberalism”, “moderation,” “rationality”, “education” and “spirituality”. “Being modern” was used as a justification and explanation for exogamous marital unions amongst the second generation and a partner’s particular merits of good educational qualifications, professional status, relative wealth, being of a “good family” and of a middle class background were promoted. The first generation were faced with a generation who were moving towards self-selecting marriages where caste considerations were not made.

¹²⁵ The exception to the relaxation of caste purity rules was that of Hindu religious ceremonies where *Brahmin* priests were required. However, in the conducting of religious ritual and responsibilities, including food preparation (outside of the priest’s role itself) had been extended to other caste groups (even Indian Bengali Christians), although admittedly often those other castes were from the upper castes (*Brahmin*, *Baidya* and *Kayastha*). This one change of caste practices illustrates how the first generation had begun to move away from Dumont’s definition of caste as ‘divided into a larger number of permanent groups which are at once specialized, hierarchized and separated (in matters of marriage, food and physical contact) in relation to each other’ (Dumont 1961: 34).

Chitra

I don't care about caste, who does? Just a few like Tapas who think he's god's gift because he was born a Brahmin, I really think that it is dying, it is so unimportant; you just want someone who is a good guy. Caste is not something that I would consider. God does anyone these days? I want to meet an intelligent guy, who is smart, witty and not a complete loser. Someone who is a professional, although I don't mind what [he does].

However, self-selecting marriages in themselves were not enough to challenge caste hierarchy as Donner's study (2002) of the middle class of Calcutta shows, where even in "love marriages" there was still a strong inclination to marry within one's caste or sub-caste as was also shown in Fuller and Haripriya (2007) and Nishimura (1998).

Like the Izhavas in Kerala, examined by the Osellas (2000) in the early 1990s, Bengalis consented and supported marriages to Europeans and Christians; however unlike the Izhavas, the Bengalis in Britain were composed mostly of high castes, and were more accepting of other Hindu groups of various castes. While first generation did not actively search for low ranking caste groups, the increase of second generation self-selection marriages meant that the second generation potentially met and married other Indians of lower caste groups which were usually unknown to other Bengalis themselves¹²⁶. When inter-regional marriages occurred, caste was not generally volunteered or enquired about by either party, and low caste was relatively easy to hide and obscure as castes are comparatively restricted to region (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007). Ruma, a second generation Hindu female financier working for a prestigious bank in the city, came from a middle class, Kayastha family, where her father was an accountant and her mother a social worker. Ruma had been married to Madesh, an Izhava, second generation Keralan man, for four years at the time of our conversation.

Ruma

. . . I found out from his [her husband] sister, years later [after marriage] that they were from a very low caste. At first I was shocked, although I didn't act it, although inside I was. Actually she was quite shocked herself, because her parents didn't tell their children, which I think is good, because I think you can get a complex from thinking that you are lower than someone else because you were born in a particular family. I must say that I am not into caste, I don't think it is important, but I was still

¹²⁶ Within my sample two high caste women married Izhavas.

shocked all the same. I wish I wasn't. My mum had not known what caste they [Madesh's family] were from, she was pretty shocked to find out, but shrugged. What can be done when you fall in love with someone, Madesh is still the person everyone thought he was, he is still a lawyer, he hasn't become any less successful. His sister is still a doctor and his brother is a teacher, all of them have done well for themselves. My parents knew that his parents were working class, and that didn't make them feel that I couldn't marry him. They looked at him, they looked at his parents, they were decent people, what are they going to say?

. . . No I didn't really tell anyone about Madesh's caste, because number one it is none of their business, number two I don't want people to look down on him, because caste shouldn't matter and I am sure that they would say that, but I don't think I want to discuss it with them [other Bengalis].

Ruma's discovery of her husband's caste and ultimately her own caste "shocked" her. She wished that it had not, but "I was still shocked all the same". In her shock came the surprise of caste mattering, yet not mattering. When Ruma discovered Madesh's caste she felt that it was something that she should hide from sight of other Bengalis. No one had enquired of Ruma or her family members as to Madesh's caste; as was the norm. I had not encountered open or even discrete enquiry of caste membership in self-selecting marriage where there was an inter-regional marriage which might unnecessarily challenge the couple's legitimacy, which parents were not keen to do especially if the partner had other acceptable "modern" characteristics (see "Modern" status section, later in this chapter).

"Being modern" was used as a tool to explain how the second generation having strayed from caste-endogamy was still maintaining middle class Bengali sensibilities. It was not that caste endogamy was inconsistent with companionate marriage; it was becoming less consequential and identifiable as a prestigious status.

Companionate marriages were seen as emerging from several different experiences whether it was through self-selection or through parental involvement, there were particular endogamous traits relating to social origins that were being replaced with cultural and socioeconomic characteristics. In contrast to the situation described by Chris Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) educational qualifications and employment of individual men and women, and their potential happiness as congenial partners, in most

cases did not reproduce caste, although it has reinforced its reproduction of class. It is not that caste endogamy is functionally inconsistent with companionate marriage but that the intentional *searching specifically* for caste endogamous marriages are becoming a less likely starting point in finding a partner for the second generation.

Strong associations between class and caste have been well established in South Asian literature (Deshpande 2003: 116-20, 146; Fernandes 2006: 104-6; Béteille 2003: 81-2; Fuller 1999; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007) where the term “middle class” has often functioned as a code word for “upper caste”. Whilst the connection between the two cannot be denied in my own data as caste and class are highly correlated amongst the British Indian Bengalis. However, migration to Britain broadened the Bengali definition of what it meant to be “middle class” in Britain, which included and allude to those of other ethnicities and religious groups. For the second generation there was a strong shift in emphasis from caste to class, in many cases to the exclusion of caste considerations. While in some cases class may well have been an *additional* criterion (Fuller 1996; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007; Deshpande 2007), for the second generation class was displacing and eroding the importance of caste and in the case of Bengalis also that of regional-language endogamy.

UK Census documents do not detail inter-caste/intra-caste marriages but there were studies in the United States and Britain to suggest there was a moderate to high level of maintenance of amongst several Hindu groups (Khandelwal 2002 (United States); Prinja 1999 (Britain)). Whilst these figures showed a great relation between caste endogamy and marrying through parental involvement, especially for women, this was changing. Women, as discussed above, were increasingly rejecting parental involvement in their marriages and were less likely to share caste affiliations with their marriage partner. Caste maintenance for British Indian Bengalis with the onset of migration and settlement carried less weight than it once did as predicted by Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) of the Vattimas who had travelled to America.

Ghar: Family background

Conventionally in Bengal, as was the case for many of the first generation, marriage negotiations were managed and controlled by a father or guardian of unmarried

offspring. Considerations concerning the standing of a *ghar* [household, dwelling], its relative prestige, status, wealth, living conditions, and the reputation of the *ghar* within the locality (Fruzzetti 1982: 34-36) were crucial in a marriage alliance¹²⁷. While an educated girl was considered highly desirable, the bride's employment status was not considered important as she was not expected to have a job, unlike the groom. However, beyond the couple themselves Fruzzetti observed the father's profession and ownership of land (1982: 34-36) were important considerations in an alliance.

Where there was parental involvement, *ghar* status proved a much more significant matter for parents in the arrangement of their offspring's marriages. All 20 marriages (34 %) where there was a high degree of parental involvement considered and expected family background to be of "middle class" extraction. The second generation would only have been introduced to potential spouses only if their family background was capable of reaching the minimum requirements of any individual family.¹²⁸ As parents were the chief initiators of these relationships, "inappropriate" matches were not presented to their offspring as a viable choice. What was considered "appropriate" was dependant on the searcher. For the first generation there was a tendency to secure a middle class Bengali spouse where parents also shared this status.

There were a small number of British Indian Bengali mixed class households, where parents were blue collar workers and their children entered "middle class" occupations. Middle class family friends, were usually less critical of their mixed class family status and recognised them as having middle class aspirant qualities reinforced if parents showed an inclination towards "culture," "arts," and/or "literature"; they may even be referred to as "middle class" by their British Indian Bengali friends. For other first generation, one generation of education may not be a desirable enough for their second generation children spouses.

The second generation were less discriminatory in their inclinations of dating and self-selecting marriages. The situation of Rita and Raja demonstrated how one's *ghar* could greatly impact on a relationship. Rita and Raja were second generation British Indian

¹²⁷ Caste endogamy was commonly observed, however was 'not a crucial issue in Bengali marriages' (Fruzzetti 1982: 111).

¹²⁸ Conversely where there was less parental involvement as with "introductions" there was a minimum requirement of the family socioeconomic background.

Bengalis who were dating one another. Many second generation acquaintances and friends had become aware of the couple's dating and many commented that they "made a nice couple". When they started dating, Rita was in her final year of her A' levels (and after good grades, she went on to study Business Management at University) and Raja was in his first year of university. Rita's oldest brother had completed university himself and was employed as accountant in the city of London. Rita belonged to a Brahmin family, was considered attractive, her parents owned their own home, (although in an inner city borough), however her father did not have a college education and was in blue collar employment. Rita's parents thought that Raja made a nice "friend" for their daughter. Raja had had a private education, was studying at university, also belonged to a Brahmin family, his parents similarly owned their own home, and both his parents had white collar work, his father had had a college education in India and the family lived in a "good area". Raja's parents objected to their son dating Rita, they felt that the pair made an inappropriate match and made the point of not talking to Rita's parents in any social functions where both were attending.

The couple continued their relationship and his parents were amicable enough towards Rita herself, but for the duration of their relationship Raja's parents refused to speak to Rita's parents. They encouraged Raja to break up with Rita as they were unhappy about her "family situation". The parents never spoke. Bengali households where first generation men had blue collar employment were not treated as "outsiders", although this could limit first generation Bengali social circle of friends. The vast majority of their Bengali friends were employed in white collar and professional work. The fact that they owned their own house, had encouraged and enabled their children to enter university, who then entered white collar/professional occupations, was recognised as engaging with middle class values amongst their circle of family friends. The family was not ill regarded, their children were not considered any less entitled to a "middle class" status. There was much discussion, especially amongst their second generation friends of both Raja and Rita, who were outraged by Raja's parents' behaviour. Raja's second generation Bengali family friend, Neel, who had got to know Rita and her family, explained his difficulty.

Neel

I thought Raja's parents were really nice, I didn't know they were such snobs? God what did the girl have to do! She is really smart, she is really nice and she is Bengali for god sakes, that is so brilliant, with so many of us *Bongos* [Bongos or Bongs is often used by younger generation in India and sometimes by some of the second generation to refer to Bengalis] marrying non-Bongs, you'd think that they would just be grateful. Bloody piss and moan. I heard them say something once when I was 'round their house [Raja's parents], which is quite unlike them. They were just complaining, saying why are you meeting her all the time, you shouldn't mix with her too much, all this kind of stuff. I just sat in the sitting room and rolled my eyes. Auntie and Uncle are so nice to me, I wish they wouldn't do that.

An important distinction about these set of circumstances was that Rita and Raja were very young (in their late teens) their relationship began and became established before they were financially and physically independent of their parents. Raja's parents in rejecting Rita's working class parents and ultimately rejecting her did so despite her being British-Indian, Bengali, Hindu and a Brahmin. This is significant as it marks how attributed statuses were not enough for Raja's parents to be appeased, they wanted middle class, "modern" respectability.

Marrying a Bengali: Regional-language endogamy

Like caste, marriages between second generation British Indian Bengalis and other British Indians from different regional-language groups within India were not documented within the Census 2001. However, Khandelwal's (2002) and Prinja's (1999) studies suggest a relatively high number of marriages between second generation Indian regional-language groups. For this second generation 38 per cent of Bengali women and 7 per cent of Bengali men married Indians who were not Bengali. While women were more likely to marry other Indians, they were less likely to engage with inter-ethnic marriages. Although it would be difficult to ascertain why women were less likely to engage in inter-ethnic relationship, Turner and Turner (1999) have suggested that women gain more emotional intimacy from their personal relationships (with families) than men. Thus if women possessed a greater emotional investment in their romantic relationships they were less prone to risk losing that investment by engaging in relationships with other ethnic groups, if there was a perceived risk.

The second generation's marriage preferences were divided very differently amongst gender. Second generation men were more likely to marry a Bengali partner (60 per cent) than second generation women (41 per cent). Of the second generation male respondents who married Bengali women (18 men), only 22 per cent married a *British Indian Bengali* the remaining 78 per cent of those who married a Bengali woman went to India to find and then marry their wife. Having a *Bengali* wife for men particularly, was more likely to be bound up with language, family life, home, religion, food, parents, cultural associations and *pujas*. I spoke to many second generation men who described their marriage partners in terms of carrying on the Bengali culture through women, "getting on" with their parents. Tushar a second generation, professional man in his late twenties had looked unsuccessfully for a Bengali woman in Britain to marry. Since I had known him (in his mid-twenties) he expressed how he had wanted to be married specifically to a *Bengali* woman. I had even seen him ask women if they there were Bengali, to see if she might be a "possible", and I would see his disappointment on hearing that she was not and he would not pursue the matter further. Having a regional-endogamous marriage was very important to Tushar. I asked him why he particularly wanted to marry a Bengali woman.

Tushar

I want to marry a girl that will get on with my parents, I am an only child and it is important that I keep my bond with my parents. I don't want them to feel that they cannot keep that bond. If she is Bengali she can speak to my parents in Bengali, get involved in *puja*. She will be more sensitive to my parents and know where they are coming from.

For men, whose main motivation was marrying a *Bengali* bride, finding a Bengali woman from Britain was seen as more desirable than going to India to find a bride. The reason for the preference for British Bengali women was explained in terms of sharing a mutual understanding of "culture," having "similar backgrounds" and "way of life" (Prinja (1999) also writes about the preference of partner from Britain over India). Often a man and/or his parents having exhausted their search for a Bengali woman in Britain would only then head for India in search of a bride¹²⁹. Men who got married to women from India, were seen as exercising their last options of a Bengali marriage

¹²⁹ The ideal Indian woman from India was far from 'unsophisticated' (Poulter 1986:27).

partner (Jhutti 1998: 80)¹³⁰. Disability and lower educational qualifications were certainly reasons that parents looked to India, but also second generation men who were specifically looking for a *Bengali* bride and exhausted their search in Britain, which had proved difficult for many men in Britain, as Tushar explains through his own experience:

Tushar

Bengali girls [in Britain] have usually got a boyfriend, someone they met at university. They are not marrying Bengalis boys. Marrying a Bengali is really important to me, if the girl is from India, well that is all right; it doesn't matter to me.

Bengali women were often meeting partners at university and extensive networks of friends which were not necessarily limited to Bengali-regionalism. However, dating amongst Bengalis was not uncommon, but only a few ended up in marriage. There were numerous attempts by parents to “introduce” second generation Bengali singles to each other, which was met with limited success. Chiefly, second generation men and women were not marrying each other. British Bengalis (as a community) considered themselves as a relatively small pool to draw from, in comparison to other South Asian “communities” such as Gujaratis, Punjabis, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. Studies examining how groups fall away from marrying fellow group members (see Kalmijn 1998 and Fischer 1982) noted that smaller groups (like British Bengalis) were less likely to be available, while larger groups were more likely to be involved within a ethnic/regional subculture. Additionally, in the absence of extended kin, many second generation Bengalis who had grown up together, spent a great deal of time with each other through Bengali family networks, producing sibling-like relationships between the genders, having a significant impact on the lack of marital relationships developing within Bengalis who had grown up together. For women marrying a Bengali this was further reduced by disinclination to go to India to find a husband.

Laxmi

. . . we [women] can't just go to India and get a guy, it is more difficult. I wouldn't marry a guy from India, what will we have

¹³⁰ Jhutti also notes that a man who marries a woman from India often does so because he cannot find a girl in Britain. Although some of the reasons may be different (i.e. he is not educated, he has a girlfriend that the wider community knows about, he has a criminal record, divorced or has a disability) Jhutti, 1998: 80.

in common? If I marry a guy from abroad it has to be from here, America or Canada. If I marry a guy from over there and he comes to live in Britain, then I'll wonder if he married me or my passport.

. . . And any way guys in India aren't used to women from Britain, we have had very different upbringing, we need to have things in common. I want to be able to talk about the last thirty years of my life, cultural things, things that I watched as a kid, know what I am about.

It was widely believed that Indian men from India were “patriarchal” and would find second generation women and their “way of life” too challenging to their own expectations of a wife¹³¹ causing conflict in the future between the couple (Jhutti 1998: 79).¹³² This was reflected in my research with only 2 women in the last 10 years having married a Bengali man from India (does not include Indian nationals living abroad)¹³³. In the same period 7 men (all through heavy parental involvement) married Bengali women from India. As discussed in the Chapter 6: *Love and “Modern” Respectability*, women were increasingly moving away from “traditional” constructions of finding a spouse (either in Britain or elsewhere) where there was heavy parental involvement. Additionally, with limited success of “introductions” amongst Bengalis in Britain and the growing desirability of self-selective marriages, especially amongst British Indian Bengali second generation women the general trend for both men (40 per cent) and women (59 per cent) was moving towards more regional-language exogamous marriages.¹³⁴

Marrying someone Indian: Ethnic endogamy

The 2001 UK Census documents show that people from South Asian backgrounds in Britain were the least likely of ethnic minority groups to marry someone from another ethnic minority groups with only 6 per cent of Indians, 4 per cent of Pakistanis, and 3

¹³¹ Unlike women from India, who were considered as more “adaptable” (then men from India) to Britain and their spouses’ way of life.

¹³² Jhutti writes about the conflict for both men and women specifically in the Sikh practice.

¹³³ Often Indian men living abroad are seen as having been exposed to “Western life” and therefore having different expectations of their future wives.

¹³⁴ For second generation Bengali women who married a Bengali, fifty per cent of women who married Bengalis (12 women) married men from India. Of marriages performed over the last ten years, where there number is reduced to two women, which is reflective of the increasing trend for second generation women not marrying men from India (one was a self-selective marriage and the other had some parental involvement).

per cent of Bangladeshis marrying someone outside their particular Asian group (ONS web-site). Rates of inter-ethnic marriages of British Indian Bengali second generation were significantly higher than the national average of by over 20 per cent. British Indian Bengali second generation men were more likely than second generation British Indian Bengali women to have inter-ethnic marriages with, 33 per cent of men marrying non-Indians compared with 21 per cent of second generation women.

Anita

I guess I just didn't. I didn't meet a Bengali guy that I wanted to marry. There aren't a lot of us [Bengalis in Britain], we aren't like the other Indian communities, they can find someone easily amongst each other, what have we got; the Bengali boys we grew up with, no thanks, that's just weird.

I would be happy to marry an Indian, I wouldn't restrict myself, though if I met the perfect English guy, well then, that would be fantastic. But I think that the sort of guy that I want will probably be Indian, I want him to know where I am coming from, to know about our culture, some kind of cultural reference, I know it wouldn't be Bengali but it would be Indian, to know what it was like going to school here, growing up here, you know.

Indianess was a powerful ideology of an ethnic authenticity articulated through shared experience of being not only an Indian in Britain, but about being a second generation Indian, where ethnicity was produced and reproduced, internalised and politicised. Anita's alluding to a common youth experience was not necessarily measured in terms of a yardstick of authenticity, a dominant outlook or views that constituted "Indianess" (see *Tagore Centre* Chapter). While women, for example, were less likely to marry a Bengali at only 41 per cent there was a higher likelihood of ethnic endogamy (79 per cent including both "other" Indians and Bengalis)¹³⁵. However, marrying within ethnicity was still a lower per centage than the 1997-2002 *Labour Force Quarterly Survey*, from which Peach stated that 92 per cent of Indian women's partners were co-ethnics, i.e. Indian (2006: 639). The statistics were unable to measure the rate of inter-regional marriage. Men were also marrying Indians at high rates, but there was a higher likelihood that they are also *Bengali*, with only 7 per cent of men marrying Indians who

¹³⁵ Seventy-nine per cent women and sixty-seven per cent of men

were not Bengali. The significance of marrying out of one's regional group or breaking down of caste endogamy could not be captured by census material. Outside a few studies such as Prinja (1999), Jhutti (1998), Raj (2003), census data did not differentiate between Indian language groups.

Baumann's (1996: 154-7), work in Southall, examining a shared 'Asian culture' can also be applied, in a limited way, to how British Indian Bengali second generation talked about being "Indian". Many Bengali second generation shared in the Punjabi and Hindi vocabulary, the sharing of the re-invention' of *bhangra*¹³⁶ which was popular in several nightclubs, high-profile tracks entering the mainstream British music scene and 'embraced by young British Asians of every ethnic origin' (Gillespie 1995: 45). Bollywood films and the music generated from the films, in Britain and elsewhere in the diaspora, were also making a considerable contribution to developing a 'pan-Asian' (as well as Indian in the case of Bengali) identity (Gillespie 1995: 79).

The second generation talked about a 'shared culture' particularly amongst "other Indians" which usually included various Indian language groups and religions (usually not including British Muslims and other British South Asians especially British Pakistanis and British Bangladeshis) but dependent on context, situation and individual. How second generation aligned themselves in the presentation of their marriage to a British Indian (who was not Indian Bengali for example) partner was through a selective use of "Indian culture"; one that could present what Baumann described as a 'new secular, cross-religious, cross-caste, and sometimes political, discourse' (1996: 154) of an "Indian" identification. Being *Indian* was sometimes used to the exclusion of other Asians (especially Bangladeshis and Pakistanis) to suggest a more *Hindu* outlook; although the term "Asians" was used contextually. While the Indian identification was unifying in a relatively heterogeneous group, it restricted understandings of the significance of what it means to be *Indian*. Sharma (1996: 34) argued that 'the signifier . . . can be one of many temporary positionalities' and cannot be limited by this signifier. Sharma (1996: 35) was critical of both Gillespie's (1995) and Baumann's (1990) (through their discussions of *Bhangra*) arguing that Baumann's account was markedly culturalist, where Baumann's descriptions had this amalgamating potential,

¹³⁶ A traditional Punjabi folk dance, music and song, which was modernised in the late 1970s onwards.

framed in language of cultural continuity and tradition, creating a unified identity regardless of gender, caste, class and ethnicity (Sharma 1996: 36-37).

In the presentation of a second generation marriage for example, Indian identity could be used to make the marriage more amenable. If a second generation's partner was a non-Bengali Indian a part of negotiating with parents and "the community" at large would be to identify their partner and "their culture" as "Indian", and not necessarily a search for 'tradition' or 'authenticity' (although this in itself cannot be ruled out). This same relationship would not necessarily be presented as an *Indian* relationship, at a work or "White" friend context. However, to gain increased approval from parents and parents-in-law, the performance of "being Indian" was a distinct advantage, drawing cultural lines to include multi-lingual and multi-religious communities. Wimmer similarly draws our attention to the example of the Swiss who constructed an intense sense of belonging, drawing distinct boundaries toward immigrants from neighbouring countries (2002).

How boundaries were constructed was been dependent on the particular circumstances, personal preferences and politics of individuals involved. When a second generation Bengali woman dated a second generation Gujarati man, for example, which resulted in a proposal of marriage, marriages were often advocated or sold to their parents, (or parents in turn wishing to promote the marriage to other Bengalis) in terms of cultural homogeneity, where the relationship and regional migrant groups were presented in terms of cultural similarity and boundaries were blurred. First generation parents engaged themselves in strategies of gaining acceptance from other first generation of their offspring's relationship. Mothers most often were the chief purveyors of "information" about their offspring's partner. First generation friends would be told of the impending marriage of their children. There was a period of normalisation of the relationship where the couple engaged in *aashirwads*¹³⁷, engagements, dinner at their homes or family friends; parents often took the opportunity to give a narrative of the relationship, how they met, what happened, who the partner was and about their family. Relationships were often spoken of in a positive light, rarely spoken of in the negative. Of particular note was the tendency to mention (if thought could further enhance the

¹³⁷ *Aashirwads* are engagements rituals, sometimes a priest presides but most often they are less formal, with family and friends.

status of the marriage) future offspring's partner in terms of jobs, ethnicity, religion (if thought appropriate), profession, their parents' profession and personality qualities. Mita Auntie (Rekha's mother) had told me after I had met Hiresh at her home:

Mita

Hiresh is such a lovely boy, they [Rekha and Hiresh] will be getting married, they were thinking next year. He has finished his accountancy exams and has a good job. . . . Gujaratis and Bengalis have so many similarities. We use lots of the same words for things. He has a nice family, he has an older sister. They are very nice, they are Brahmins. He has a good job in the city he is doing very well.

Mita in her description was attempting to blur the boundaries between "Bengalis" and "Gujaratis", making their union a more amicable one, trying to downplay the regional endogamy and promote the ethnic and caste one. This strategy invested by most first generation parents to support their offspring's marital decision regardless of partner's level of status homogamy. However, this sharing of culture was situational, as an ethnic category, as Wimmer argues, should not represent an actor with a 'single purpose and shared outlook' (2008: 981), as it neglects to notice that ethnic categories may vary contextually.

When Shanti's engagement was announced to many of Shanti's parents' friends, many had already met Dinesh and had considered him a very "nice *chelé*" [boy]. Her parents when mentioning the impending marriage would recount Dinesh's suitable marriage attributes. Even Shanti's father who had initially been unhappy about the match took part in celebrating his future son-in-law's particular attributes and qualities. Khukhu Aunty was primary transmitter of the news of the impending marriage of Dinesh and Shanti. She told my mother, me, Aunty Ekka in the course of general conversation at a wedding reception that Shanti¹³⁸ was getting married to Dinesh:

Khukhu Aunty:	And I have some news, Shanti will be getting married next year
Aunty Ekka:	Oh good news, who is the boy?
Mahashweeta:	That's very good news, Dinesh is a <i>bhalo chele</i> [good boy].
Khukhu Aunty:	She is marrying a very nice boy; his name is Dinesh, Gujarati <i>chelé</i> [translating "boy", however is meant in terms of endearment to even a man, especially if he is unmarried], very

¹³⁸ Who was also present, but chatting to some other second generation Bengalis at the time in another part of the hall.

good boy. He studied medicine with Shanti, he is going to be a surgeon, he is brilliant, very smart. His family live in Wembley, they are not very far. We've met them several times, we went to have a blessing at their temple. They are a good family, his father is a GP, he is very good person. You've met Dinesh, haven't you Anusree?

Anusree: Yes Aunt, he's lovely. Shanti told me that she was getting married what good news. They make a really nice couple.

Khukhu Aunt: Yes. I am so pleased, this is a mother's wish to see her children married and settled with a good person and family; my duty will be done. [Looking at Marti and Aunt Ekka, who nod in agreement.]

Both Khukhu and Mita described their future son-in-laws using informal and ascribed status interchangeably. Where Khukhu son-in-law's brilliance was attributed to his being a "good person" and also having "studied medicine," studying to be surgeon, being of a "good family," where his father was a GP, "being Hindu" and being of a "good family" having satisfied these criteria this marriage had thus fulfilled her parental "duty".

The growing shift away from endogamy (of caste and regional-language) amongst the second generation, saw in its place the development of newer status distinctions. The second generation were aware of the situational value of sharing ethnicity, and were not averse to advancing their own relationship in the eyes of their parents and the wider "Bengali community". Shiuli, a second generation Hindu woman, who was a white collar professional, met her husband at university; she described her discomfort at her relationship being defined in terms of ethnic endogamy but recognised the advantages of being labelled so.

Shiuli

Don't get me wrong, I am proud to be married to an Indian man, we share many cultural references, we understand about racism and prejudice, we know what it is like to be Indian in Britain, living in the seventies, eighties and nineties and the naughties is it? But we also share an interest in Art House films, books, although different genres, we love the theatre, the cinema, we love eating out, we love discussing politics. I fell in love with *him* because he is intelligent, funny, someone who speaks his mind, I am not sure it was because he was Indian, he is not particularly Indian, but some people seem to think that I am some kind of saint for having married an Indian, but the truth is I could have married someone of any race, Joy just happened to be

Indian. I think the parents [other people's parents] thought I was going to run off with a white boy, which in truth – perhaps not run off but I could have met a lovely guy who happened to be English or something. So they [some of the first generation] were saying things like I was a good example to others, as if by marrying a Hindu Indian I was doing a great service to the cause of marriage and being Indian. I thought it was all a bit crap, unnecessary adulation. But they thought Joy was great. He just had to smile and exchange pleasantries, it was made very easy for him, he didn't look too different I guess, he was brown, Hindu, and that was enough for the aunties and uncles although I shouldn't complain too hard and long as they were very kind to the pair of us. It was easy for us, people embraced our relationship.

Homogenising strategies were often used to draw on similarities and positive attributes shared between two *Indian* groups that commends their future spouse this was further espoused by first generation parents to their Bengali friends; often using any status, ascribed or “modern” to laud their future son/daughter in law and their Indian regional group. So in this regard, British Indian Bengalis were dissimilar to Khandelwal's Indians in New York where the first generation endeavoured to make certain that their offspring married partners ‘from their own caste or at least their own regional group’ (2002: 152). British Indian Bengalis were redefining the emphasis placed on endogamy, shifting importance into value based statuses; however if ascribed status existed this would more often than not be mentioned by the first generation, much less so by the second.

Marrying within religious group: religious endogamy¹³⁹

Similarly to marrying within ethnic group, intra-marrying co-religionists were documented as high amongst Hindus in the Census. Census data established that 7 per cent of Hindu women did not marry co-religionists (Peach 2006). Amongst British Indian Bengali women, however, the rate was much higher with 28 per cent marrying out of religious group. The figure was even higher for British Indian Bengali men at 47 per cent. Marriage between South Asians often portrayed as primarily as ‘a family affair’ and a matter related to honour, *izzat* (see Shaw 2001; Chapter 5: *Modern Bengali Women*), was being challenged by the significantly larger number of British Indian

¹³⁹ The majority of my second generation were Hindu (90%) and the rest were Christian.

Bengalis who were marrying outside of their own religious groups, although significantly low numbers with Muslims (2 cases amongst this group). Higher rates of inter-religious marriages in comparison to inter-ethnic marriages amongst the second generation were consistent with other studies where there was religious diversity in societies. These works showed higher rates of religious exogamy over ethnic exogamy (Laumann 1973; Verbrugge 1977; Fischer 1977, 1982; Marsden 1988 and Louch 2000) which amongst British Indian Bengali showed a 10 per cent differential between marrying outside of ethnic group (27 per cent) and marrying outside of religious group.

Marrying outside of ethnicity and religious affiliation: locating “modern” respectability

The British Indian Bengalis did not wage a ‘cultural crusade’ for ethnic purity as was described by Maira’s of second generation Indians (2002: 148); where parental ‘cultural fossilization’ created a conservative value system advanced by parents (Maira 2002; Jhutti 1998 Prinja 1999; Khandelwal 2002). Indeed the second generation tended to fit the profile of individuals most likely to enter into inter-ethnic marriages, research suggests that ‘western’ (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990), urban (Cready & Saenz, 1997), younger (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990), and educated (Qian, 1997) individuals were more likely to outmarry’ (Yancey 2007).

The series of successful negotiations and strategies used by second generation where their partner did not possess caste, regional, ethnic and/or religious endogamy, drew on alternative qualities. These attributes included: personality characteristics; social origins; class; wealth; occupation (of individual and their family); educational parity or positive distinguishing features of a particular ethnic group or religion; in an attempt to make their partner or marital partner a more attractive prospect to their parents and the wider “Bengali community”.

This production of “modern” respectability, did not always sit seamlessly with parental expectations there was a pressure on parents to embrace “modern” authenticity. Parents were expected to be “modern” through their acceptance of their own offspring’s

marriages and marriages of other second generation (within reason)¹⁴⁰ through the level of discourse or rhetoric, but also through their actions or situated cultural practice. This expectation was placed on them by second generation but also by other first generation members. Inter-ethnic marriages constituted 27 per cent of second generation marriages, no longer the exception or taboo. Opposition to partners were softened by dating strategies (as discussed earlier) increased familiarity and ultimately acceptance of a boyfriend or girlfriend. Inter-ethnic marriages included marriages mainly to English men and women, but also included second generation British Chinese and Europeans. Commonly couples met each other at university, employment or through their network of friends. Sumit, a second generation Bengali, brought up in London, attended a public school, after successful A' Level results, Sumit studied Physics at University of Birmingham. While at university he met Sarah, after nine months they began to share student lodgings together with a few of their university friends. His parents were aware that Sarah was a friend, who was one out of several university friends who shared a house together. As their relationship developed Sumit, informed his parents of his relationship with Sarah. Sumit, like many other Bengalis, who had relationships with "White" partners, did not avoid involvement in situations and potential relationships as it was not perceived as permanently jeopardising relationships with their family.

The conditions for developing a relationship across ethnic boundaries were increased with the absence of a disapproving 'community'. Even though the second generation anticipated parental disapproval, increasingly within inter-ethnic relationships there was room for negotiation. Especially as inter-ethnic marriages were more common. There was less fear of complete removal of parental support:

Sumit

When I told my mum about Sarah, she was a little bit worried that Sarah would not take care of me, like a good little Indian wife. But she got to know Sarah. She isn't just some woman, she is someone who *gets* the Hindu culture. She has a real interest in Hinduism, she studied it as a part of her studies, she has a real interest in our culture. When we went to India, everyone [his extended family] said that Sarah was like a typical Bengali wife. They loved her, they thought that she was so sweet

¹⁴⁰ Therefore a parent's refusal or negative response to a partner of Afro-Caribbean descent or a partner of Muslim faith, is understood.

and gentle and had brought up our children in a good way, where they learned about Hinduism.

This strategy of highlighting “modern” attributes, such as their disposition, values and education in one’s partner was a strategy to make ethnic exogamous relationship more acceptable. Sumit’s use of “like a typical Bengali wife,” “real interest in our culture,” “gets the Hindu culture,” “so sweet and gentle,” were a constructive use of adjectives to in effect to woo parents and other Bengalis as to the suitability of Sarah, his wife. This was a process and dialogue that could be entered into by the second generation, where the novelty of “Whiteness” no longer existed (with 20 per cent of second generation marriages within my sample marrying someone who was “White”).¹⁴¹

African-Caribbean partners however were seen as wholly unacceptable by the first generation, and this was reflected in this study, where none of my second generation informants had married an African-Caribbean partner. While dating between the two groups had occurred, they were generally kept secret even from other second generation Bengalis; some of whom had explicitly expressed racist views against people of African-Caribbean descent. For many such relationships were considered too problematic to enter into, let alone sustain. Those who expressed these excluding outlooks, commonly argued vehemently that they were *not* racist against people of African-Caribbean descent. Explaining that “we have a different culture”; that as a group, Afro-Caribbean people were “not as successful” or “academic” and had “no culture” as Bengalis themselves had had. Even when asked if an African-Caribbean individual was truly “exceptional” having excelled in their education and profession, having a middle class family were still reluctant to give a reason beyond “they have a different culture”. Undesirability of African-Caribbean people as potential marriage partners was not often described in terms of skin colour, but if pushed there were explanations of hierarchies of peoples where African-Caribbean were towards the bottom of this social structure.

¹⁴¹ One of the first inter-ethnic marriages amongst my second generation sample in the eighties was met with parental antagonism from her father, who refused to take part or talk to his daughter or her husband. The wedding went ahead with many first and second generation attending. However they were reconciled a year later, and her father accepted her union.

Likewise, the taboo of Muslim partners and spouses was loathed by their first generation parents.¹⁴² Prejudice by British Hindu and British Christian Bengalis towards British Muslims particularly in regards to marriage was often described as “not prejudice” as they often “explain” that they did not object to friendship with Muslims, but that marriage especially with Muslims are “difficult” because of issues of conversion into Islam, their “traditions” which are regarded as “intolerant,” “traditional” and thus “not compatible” with Indian Hindu (or Christian) Bengalis. The second generation spoke of the “hurt” that such a union would cause their parents, and as many grandparents, extended family and a few parents had experienced partition first hand, to marry a Muslim was rarely carried out. However, amongst my sample two men had married Pakistani Muslim women. Both had met their wives through work and shared their professions as doctors and dentists. One of the unions followed the expected route of being kept low key with very few people being told of their marriage and without a Hindu wedding or reception for Bengali family friends. The other marriage followed a surprisingly different path.

Anjan was a doctor who met his girlfriend, Riya through work; she was a Pakistani Muslim, who had newly qualified as a doctor. Anjan kept the relationship from his parents for over two years, although they were aware that she was his colleague. As the relationship grew more serious, they wished to marry, and it was decided by the couple that their parents needed to be told. Anjan told his parents about Riya.

Anjan

I couldn't have told them before; it was all or nothing with me and Riya. I know if I told them it would be constant grief, constant, why are you going out with her, she is Muslim, we are Hindus we don't marry Muslims, they will want you to convert, blah, blah, blah . . .

¹⁴² For the first generation the range of possible religious and/or ethnic exogamous marriages could be placed in a hierarchy of acceptability. Within the range of possible religions for Hindus, Hindu-Christian unions, if they belonging to the same language/regional groups was seen as acceptable, and not undesirable, there were several marriages to this effect, even where there was parental involvement in marriages Christian-Hindu Bengali marriages were not discounted, especially when broadening searches for a possible marriage partner, although homogeneity is usually preferred in these circumstances. This proclivity towards Bengali-Hindu and Bengali-Christian (even in favour of inter-regional-language marriages) was observed by Donner in her thesis (1999: 135-137) whereby the marriage is framed in terms of language and customs with minor cultural contradictions between the two. However the relatively small Bengali-Christian group in Britain reduced a likelihood of this preferred religious exogamous pairing. Hindu-Christian marriages were not uncommon amongst the first generation. Most other religions although placed in a particular preference was dependent on an individual's own experience, levels of comfort and prejudice (or lack of).

I just told them. It was one of the most difficult things I had to do in my life, they didn't know about us, so it was a real shock. Ma was really shocked, she didn't take the news very well. She started shouting and screaming and then crying. Dad was quiet. He just listened, although I knew that he was really upset. Riya being Muslim was very hard for them; they thought that I would convert to Islam and abandon my Hindu heritage.

Later when things got calmer I told them that I had not intention of becoming Muslim, but that was Riya's religion. They asked what her parents would think of all this. I told them that they were in Pakistan, Riya's father was a doctor, a good man, learned, not fanatical, but we hadn't spoken to him yet.

For Anjan the usual Bengali second generation strategy of gently easing parents into accepting a girl/boyfriend was not an option he felt he could take. Taboo relationships encouraged the second generation to construct a very opaque partitioning between parents-“Bengali” life and their love life. The permeability of fields usual in Bengali dating became closed to Anjan because of the initial antagonism anticipated and thus redundant to him. Strongly discouraged second generation relationships, unless they entered the realms of marriage, were kept secret to avoid inevitable parental upset, rage or potential disownment. Amongst Bengalis there were many stereotypes and morality accounts of ill-fated relationships and marriages with Muslims resulting in conversion and ill-treatment of women. Muslim stereotyping was a common experience widespread in other Hindu groups in Britain (see Prinja 1999; and Jhutti 1998).

Anjan negotiated the terms of the marriage with his parents which required the couple to agree to two major stipulations as a condition of parental acceptance. Firstly that Anjan would not convert to Islam; secondly, that any children that they had would be brought up as Hindus after the father's religion; thirdly, that they would have a Hindu wedding ceremony and finally, that there would be no Islamic ceremony. Anjan and Riya agreed to these conditions, with their agreements Anjan's parents, especially his father, embraced their union. Anjan's parents contributed a large proportion towards a large, impressive Hindu wedding and reception at a lavish hotel, where many of their friends were called. Anjan's parents it seemed to me were instrumental to the response from other Bengalis, who mirrored theirs. At Anjan's wedding his father, Ranjit, spoke of Riya in terms of endearment showering her with praise for her beauty, demeanour, good

nature, gentleness and sweetness and her own flourishing career in medicine, which he was proud of. Ranjit's father in his public praise for his new daughter-in-law highlighted attributes of Riya's education, occupation, attitudes and abilities, the newer, "modern" and increasingly the more prominent determinants in many second generation marriages.

Ballard remarks that it was salient that 'most marriages in Britain based on "free" choice were, in fact, contracted between partners of similar personal, social and cultural background' (1978: 183) which is a sentiment echoed by Goode, (1982: 53-55; see also Bourdieu 1990) who similarly adds that mostly marriages in America occur between couples of the same class, religious, racial and educational levels (also see Rothman 1984: 17-55; Brady 1991: 95). For many of these second generation there certainly was similarity between partners, but increasingly they were not restricted to caste, regional-language, ethnic and religious groups. Instead, spousal selection sought parity with statuses and attributes such as: education; occupation; social class; attitudes; abilities; beliefs and aspirations

Education, occupation and class

The reduction of ascribed statuses has been dwarfed by a staggering 98 per cent of second generation sharing similar levels of education with their marital partner. No single status showed greater parity amongst the second generation British Indian Bengalis than education; marking for them perhaps one of the most commonly sought or obtained attributes when finding a marriage partner. Parental preferences for attributed statuses were losing their influence but were not without impact and significance in marriage selection amongst the second generation.

Parity in educational background was perhaps the strongest factor in selection of a partner amongst second generation marriages, reflected by 98 per cent of second generation sharing similar levels of education. (Discrepancies usually came in the form of varying levels of postgraduate education, which was not restricted to a particular gender¹⁴³). First generation married couples higher levels of educational disparity

¹⁴³ So there were cases of graduate women marrying postgraduate men, as well as the reverse where graduate men were marrying postgraduate women.

(where a higher proportion of men tended to have higher educational qualifications). However, education of women was highly valued by first generation women and the transformation towards educational homogamy for their second generation sons and daughters was welcomed and expected.

For Bengalis of both generations, education and occupation was vitally important as status bearers which in turn were considered “good” marital criteria, similarly experienced by other Indians including the Maheshwaris (Pache Huber 2004: 172-93, in Fuller and Narasimhan 2007) and Vattimas (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007; Bourdieu 1984). Academic success was measured by grades achieved, higher educational institutions entered into and postgraduate qualifications attained. Achievements of the second generation generally were proudly discussed with graduation photos adorning sitting rooms, hallways and lounges. Prestigious careers such as within medicine, dentistry, engineering, academia, law, pharmaceuticals, finance and IT were dropped into conversation as are well known prestigious institutions that they may work for such as the investment bank, Goldman Sachs or accountancy firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers; and career developments and promotions. Failure of A’ levels or end of year university examinations are either covered up or despaired upon, as the pressure for second generation to succeed is great.

Educational background, it has been argued, had an increasing influence on marriage formation whilst at the same time social origins, region, ethnicity, religion and caste were changing and being changed in their meaning (Blossfeld and Timm 2003; Mare 1991; Kalmijn 1991a and 1991b). Bengalis families and the wider “Bengali community” were reflecting this in their experience of marriage, in opposition to much of the diasporic literature which stated that ethnicity is and ‘ethnic’s’ primary identity. Second generation’s increased levels of inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriages could be linked to studies that correlated higher education with a greater likelihood of inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriages amongst university and higher educated individuals (Marsden 1988, Kalmijn 1998; McPherson et al. 2001) and amongst white collar workers (Kalmijn 1998 and Hout 1982).

Of the 81 second generation respondents in this study, 74 (91 per cent) studied higher education institutions¹⁴⁴. Not furthering one's education through higher education was very rarely an option, consequently there was a very high rate of higher education amongst the Bengalis. Both second generation men and women were equally expected to achieve academically and professionally; women were not simply educated for men to be "congenial partners" (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007). Women's education was seen as a part of "being modern", a way to be independent, self-sufficient and a matter of family status (see chapter 5: *"Modern" Bengali Women*) where they were able to extend family (and individual) cultural capital and an indicator of their cultural resources. Work by Raley, et al. (2006) who examined dual-income couples from the 1970s until 2001 in the United States, argued that a woman's university education and particularly a postgraduate education was strongly associated with the likelihood of being in a dual-income couple¹⁴⁵. Dual-wage was often regarded by Bengalis (both first and second generation) as essential to sustain a desirable lifestyle (Mui-Teng Quek, and Knudson-Martin 2006) and a way to obtain and sustain a relatively large mortgage¹⁴⁶. Women's education, like men's was also a significant marker of their economic resources, consequently making education a more valuable criterion (Schoen and Cheng 2006; White and Rogers 2000). This was especially the case as there was reliance on educational proxies Oppenheimer (1988) to establish the type of career a potential marriage partner would have in the future, their lifetime income and cultural orientation (Mare 1991; Kalmijn 1991:35-39), their social status and economic well-being of the couple (Fu 2001). Therefore, the second generation placed a greater emphasis on their partner's educational attainment; rather than the socioeconomic status of a father's occupational status (Blau and Duncan 1967; Duncan et al. 1972; Jencks 1972; Treiman and Terrell 1975). Kalmijn (1991) argues:

. . . education is not only an important determinant of the spouses' cultural resources before marriage, but it may also function as the

¹⁴⁴ Non-attending members included 3 of the second generation with learning difficulties/disabilities, 3 others who were older second generation who entered Britain as older children and struggled to make the transition to the English education system, one chose not to pursue higher education after poor A' level results and began working as an estate agent after his A' levels.

¹⁴⁵ Although it was acknowledged that a major restricting factor for women being in a dual-income couple was the having of children, and the more children that the couple had the higher the probability that they were in a sole-breadwinning arrangement.

¹⁴⁶ Nock (2001), asserts that couples are evolving towards equally shared breadwinning. He coins the acronym 'MEDS' which stands for 'marriages of equally dependent spouses', whereby both partners contributes 40%–59% of the family income.

prime indicator of the spouses' cultural and socioeconomic characteristics after marriage. This double function of education may well make it the most important factor in marriage selection. (1991: 502)

Kalmijn goes on to profile how educational careers that go beyond school often mean that individuals move away from their parental home and have an extensive social life (1991: 503). Universities, Scott argues are an 'excellent marriage market' (1965: 521), this has been reflected in my figures where a quarter of all second generation Bengali self-selecting marriages were initiated at university, making them an 'efficient' marriage market. By entering universities and other higher education institutions it exposes second generation to the formation of friendship circles who shared similar levels of education. Kalmijn (1991: 503) recognised that being habituated to these 'patterns of social interaction' strengthened their probability of marrying someone with similar levels of education. Certainly all but one Bengali second generation married a partner with similar education to themselves. Education and "being educated"¹⁴⁷ frequently functioned as code for "middle class" and "modern" indicating few intimate and profound relations between members of different social groups (Birkelund and Heldal 2003: 2).

It was expected by both generations that marriage partners should be educated and therefore "middle class", divergence was rare; Krishna's was one of these rare examples. When Krishna announced her impending marriage to a plumber, Alan, her declaration was met with a figurative stunned silence. Most family friends expressed happiness for the couple and made a point of not referring to either to his ethnicity, his "working class" parents or his less than conventional profession (for British Bengalis) as a plumber. Kuntala, a first generation "aunt" of Krishna's, commented on Krishna's impending marriage to Alan, who was considered "working class" by many Bengalis that I spoke to, even though he *owned* his own business. This was most often linked with the fact that he did not have a university degree and that Alan's parents were blue collar workers, and was not in a career that many *Bengalis* associated with the "middle classes", which further emphasised his status as "working class", despite owning his own business.

¹⁴⁷ "Educated people" further suggested that there was an educational heritage in family ancestry refining and deepened respect, especially amongst the first generation.

Kuntala

Why can't she [Krishna] marry someone middle class, she has a good job, she comes from a good middle class family . . . you know these things are very important, having things in common, if someone is of a lower class . . . well you know . . . this is no good. It doesn't matter that he is white but it would have been good if he was a doctor, engineer, lawyer, something like that, on the same level. He is not cultured like her and their family.

Kuntala, herself was expressing her views as a "concerned" aunty, she had seen Krishna grow from a young child and was genuinely saddened by Krishna's wishes to marry Alan, seeing it as step down the social class ladder. She was concerned that Alan was "lower class", had no university qualifications and had a family that was "not cultured" like Krishna's parents. Kuntala compared Alan to other spouses where even when language, ethnicity or religion differed that solace could be sought through qualities such as education and middle class status¹⁴⁸. This was a common view expressed by the first generation in regards to their own offspring's marriages. It was almost unimaginable that their children would marry anyone who was not a university graduate and white collar professional of some kind. This outlook was mirrored amongst second generation with less explicit references to class. However, the marriages of second generation reflected their almost complete gravitation towards university clad individuals.

Apart from Krishna, all of the other university graduates in this study got married to a university graduate, regardless of whether they were self-selecting or had parental involvement, regardless of ethnicity, religion or language. Consistently education and occupation were mirrored amongst partners of Bengalis graduates (allowing for discrepancies of differing levels of postgraduate studies). Whilst in marriages some men might have more educational qualifications than their spouse (Fruzzetti 1982) there were many cases where this was reverse was true and women had higher postgraduate education than their husbands, but this was not considered a matter of controversy; educational attainment if the first and important bar of graduate degrees were fulfilled was considered less of an issue.

¹⁴⁸ The issue of marrying into an ethnic group that was neither Hindu nor Indian was less important to her especially as Kuntala's own son had married a non-Indian, which limited her criticism to class where previously it had included ethnicity.

Trends in status parity in the United States of America, developed since Blau and Duncan (1967)¹⁴⁹ showed the correlation between spouses' education was stronger than the correlation between spouses' social class origins. This actualisation of preferences for cultural similarity based on education rather than of social origins and *ghar* was reproduced amongst the second generation.

Education of one's spouse had become a more important proxy than their parental status as a predictor of matching socioeconomic status. This corresponded with the decline in the importance given to father's occupation and son's first occupational origins and destinations (Featherman and Hauser 1978: 259). The family background of spouses marrying second generation Bengalis tended to be varied although with a higher percentage of parents having either white collar or professional employment (92 per cent). However, within "white collar" occupations, there was a great deal of diversity including low level administration and clerical work to high level managerial posts. Lower white collar parental occupation status that might otherwise be considered undesirable in marriages where there was parental involvement, were accepted as a by-product of a self-selecting marriage. The second generation were able through dating strategies and the status of spouse's education alone to bypass disapproval by virtue of "low status" in-laws. This reduction of social distance could be brought together by any number of cultural resources including 'values, norms, life-styles, leisure activities, taste, intellectual erudition, styles of speech, and life experiences' Kalmijn (1991: 501). Similarity of cultural background meant individuals shared a 'common universe of discourse' (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985).

Conclusion

Peach argued that 'anthropological evidence' showed that amongst Indians marriages were overwhelmingly within religious and caste groups (Peach 2006: 639).¹⁵⁰ Caste, as I have shown, has been significantly diminished in importance by most second generation Bengalis in marriage, and has been accepted (begrudgingly so in a few cases) by the first generation. The fact that first generation did not organise themselves

¹⁴⁹ See also: Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 2007; Hyman et al. 1975; Hyman and Wright 1979; Davis 1982.

¹⁵⁰ The significance and the number of Indians marrying outside of caste and language groups cannot be revealed through the Census, requiring individual regional-language analysis.

through caste associations and groups further encouraged the breakdown of this social structure and social relationships through the caste system. For the second generation caste has lost much of its relevance.

Reconfiguration of the social system along class lines has been instrumental in the transformation of 'traditional' ideas of prestige. While B  teille's (2003: 81-2) argument that 'new forms of [class] stratification are created through the reconstitution of long-standing inequalities such as gender and caste' applies to several marriages where a second generation married a Bengali (both amongst self-selecting and parental assisted marriages), it did not explain the growing number of inter-regional-language, inter-religious and inter-ethnic marriages amongst the second generation. Ideas of respectability amongst the second generation and indeed their first generation parents have undergone a process of metamorphosis, where class has developed outside of ascribed statuses. Self-selective marriages have seen the greatest potential for transformation, where parental influence was at its weakest.

The second generation by entering higher education *en masse* have intentionally restricted their marriage pool to similarly highly educated partners; whilst at the same time broadening their marriage pool heterogamously, being more likely to marry outside of their own language/regional and religious groups.

Men, on the other hand, were more likely to have a marriage with parental assistance, however when they had self-selecting marriages they were much more likely than women to marry outside of ethnic and/or religious groups. Widespread educational parity between the second generation and their partners indicated that education was an even more substantial foundation of social distinctions amongst Bengalis. Education was so central in the construction of Bengali middle class identity that not marrying a spouse with further education was less likely (although only slightly) than a Bengali Hindu marrying a spouse of the Muslim faith.

Outside of parental involvement in spouse selection, the second generation was attempting to reconstruct a "middle class" identity around a "modern" respectability through spouse's shared levels of education. Sometimes education levels were considered alongside long standing status, however more often ascribed statuses were

being rejected and the rhetoric of the valuing of “newer”, “modern” statuses were put in its place.

First generation acceptance of their offspring’s decisions had come from their own changing perceptions of what it meant have a “modern” respectability, appreciating the importance of their children’s happiness but also with a realisation that their children were financially and physically independent of them. This resulted in parental collusion with their children to enable, accept and negotiate their offspring’s “modern” unions whilst both generations maintained or asserted their middle class, educated, professional, “modern” identity and rhetoric over and above ascribed statuses.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown how second generation British Indian Bengalis have attempted to negotiate their identity through a “modern”, middle class respectability. This “modern” respectability formed a part of an identity strategy to distance the second generation from negative South Asian stereotypes prevalent in the media, work institutions and in day-to-day life. These negative racial and religious stereotypes of the dominant society shaped the ethnic identity formation of the second generation; whereby they constructed adaptive responses to internalised mainstream racist values and rationales. Some of the second generation distinguished themselves not only from the stereotypes but began contributing to homogenised stereotypes of other ethnic and religious groups, especially of British Bangladeshi Muslims and British South Asian Muslims. This prejudice in Britain aimed at British Bangladeshi Muslims by British Indian Bengalis was twinned with long-standing prejudices of Islam.

Second generation anxiety around their identity stemmed from trying to communicate their “modern”, middle class respectability to British middle class White society, but also to other middle class ethnic groups including their own through their lifestyles, work and social practices. This self-presentation, as I argued Chapter 3, extended to many areas of their lives, particularly prominent were workplaces where work colleagues were predominantly British white middle class.

As middle classes, in the British context, was predominantly depicted as being British White, this resulted in the second generation demonstrating an additional and alternate construction of boundary formation to indicate their class belonging. In addition to displaying, for example, their relative comfortable economic positioning (Raisborough and Adams 2008)¹⁵¹ and socially ‘liberal’ attitudes (Vincent and Ball 2006; Brantlinger et al. 1996); second generation middle class also felt in order to produce and reproduce their *British Indian Hindu* (and *Christian*) middle class credentials that they were also required to display self-imposed criterion of “modern” respectability which required communicating distance of social practices such as: dowry, “arranged marriage”,

¹⁵¹ Although Raisborough and Adams (2008) add that economic positioning alone is no longer a ‘secure and reliable’ measure of class boundaries.

“forced marriage”, “honour killings”, being a “religious fundamentalist” and having a patriarchal family and community. In addition some of the second generation went a step further to attribute negative stereotypes to ‘other’ British South Asians, to British Muslims and specifically to British Bangladeshi Sylheti Muslims. The social mechanisms second generation employed to manage their social identities at work was influenced by work colleagues’ attitudes (perceived or actual) towards South Asian social practices and their own attitudes and values. The second generation expressed hesitancy about talking about *Indian* social and cultural practices in the workplace, if they did, they often felt a need to distinguish and/or explain away recognisable or anticipated stereotypes. The unease of feelings of being singled out or mistakenly misrepresented as adhering to homogenising stereotypes made second generation reluctant to open up their “Indian lives” to “non-Indian” or “non-Asian” colleagues who they felt would “not understand” the nuances of what it meant to be a British South Asian, British Indian or British Indian Bengali in Britain.

The second generation also often emphasised their *professional* conduct in the workplace, by way of coding their under-communication of possible negative markers of South Asianess; as if to underline the contradiction of British White middle class acceptance with negative stereotypical depictions of South Asian social practices. While there has been a sense of South Asian culture in Britain becoming ‘cool’ more recently (Alexander 2000; Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996) with ‘a blaze of bindis, nose studs and henna tattoos’ (Alexander 2000: 228) their appearance on the second generation have been context driven and tentative. As Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma’s (1996) collection also indicate this new ‘cool’ veils the history and ongoing social exclusion, scrutiny and resistance of South Asian social practices.

In some contrast to the workplace, the second generation’s relationship with their first generation parents showed growing levels of transparency between different cultural and social fields. The first generation were sympathetic to second generation social practices, although this is not to suggest that their lives were not without conflict and selective partitioning. However, their inter-generational relationships were moving away from those depictions that showed first generation parents frowning on second generation having friends of the opposite gender, dating and drinking alcohol (see:

Dhooleka 2003; Maira 2002; Alexander 2000; Prinja 1999; Bhopal 1999; Brah 1979; Ballard 1979).

Second generation's social lives and networks were highly varied, most of my second generation respondents were not strongly anchored within the British Indian Bengali community, although many of them had British Indian Bengali friends or British Indian Bengali friendship groups. However, they did not often meet as a very large group outside of weddings, funerals or *pujas*. The second generation often expressed a sense of disconnection with the "Bengali community" which often coincided from the time they left home for university. This sense of disconnect was exacerbated by their dispersion around various locations within London and having other social networks that extended across a wide range of ethnic, religious and interest groups.

In chapter 4, *Trying to Become Bengali*, the second generation illustrated their lack of community cohesion. Although initially within the Youth Forum there was great interest in creating a second generation *Bengali* space, they themselves did nothing to mobilise themselves as an ethnic group, they were assembled by the first-generation. The second generation as they began to participate, varied in their interest, the majority rejecting partaking in dramatic performances – the imposed scripts (quite literally in the case of dramatic performances) of what "Bengali culture" was. The Youth Forum was a product of a first generation middle class venture; its imposed ethnic identification was a step too far. The second generation were more comfortable with the social aspect of the Tagore Centre, which contained little to no reference to a rigid ethnic programme beyond "having a good time," having "*R n'B*" and "*Bhangra*" music and "Indian food". The second generation's inability to sustain the Youth Forum was further evidence of the second generation's disconnection with a "Bengali community". Although it would be premature and indeed inaccurate to say that this second generation group was abandoning their 'distinctive cultural traits' and adopting 'those of the dominant culture' (Robertson 1981: 284) their disinclination to sustain a second generation "Bengali group" reflected their broader strategies to search for class identifiers. Certainly the second generation had invested heavily in middle class cultural capital and a "modern" respectability, which saw women as 'bearers of the collective' (Yuval-Davis 1980).

Chapter 5, *“Modern” Bengali Women*, challenged the assumption that all South Asian groups reproduced boundaries of national, ethnic or regional difference through the control of women and their sexuality. British Indian Bengalis attempted to construct boundaries through communicating their agency, their promotion of further education, self-sufficiency and changing social practices surrounding women (such as dowry, *izzat* and “arranged marriage”). They contested notions of *izzat* being the ‘symbolic repository of group identity’ (Kandiyoti 1991). However, as this chapter showed, women remained vessels of culture. They were framed through different criteria, through: “modern” middle class identification, education, postponement of marriage, “freedom” to “marry whosoever”, to be “independent” and exercise agency. These identifications attempted to challenge “negative” stereotypes of South Asian women as “victims” of a patriarchy, which have been asserted in the media as well as in academic literature.

However, with the *success* of “being modern” had resulted in a departure from the ‘map of living’ (Khandelwal 2002: 118) which saw an increase in unmarried women in their mid-thirties and childless in their forties. This caused intergenerational friction, where the second generation were met with first generation parents in near panic of their daughter’s “situation”. What Abu-Lughod (1998: vii) describes as the ‘[h]idden costs and unanticipated’ consequences of the “modern”. However, second generation women were contesting the ‘map of living’ and reimagining new guides to their lives.

Chapter 6: *Love and “Modern” Respectability*, examined the strategies used in the asserting of romantic love by the second generation, which were used to dissociate with stereotypes associated with “arranged marriages” and stereotypical assumptions about themselves as “traditional” South Asians. However, romantic love also produced a pressure on second generation to present themselves as “being modern” especially when their marriages were initiated through parental involvement. The presentation of such a marriage would often contain a verbalised love and romance narrative. This narrative suggested attempts to distinguish confirm and maintain their “modern” middle class respectability away from “traditional” homogenous South Asian “arranged marriages”.

Chapter 7, *Marriage Selection*, explored how inter-marriage, often described in terms of being the last vestige of maintenance of ethnic, caste, religious, regional-language

boundaries have seen significant breakdown. Nave (2000), notes, that no other institution, more than marriage, can demonstrate the maintenance of boundaries. The increase in exogamy amongst the second generation illustrated the erosions of ethnic boundaries and status homogamy more generally. There was a reimagining of what constituted a respectable marriage, previous generations of Indian Bengalis had placed great weight on searching for parity within ascribed statuses, the second generation were now proposing new criteria of respectability. This new respectability still involved mapping out approved and disapproved matches, however the content of these preferences and prejudices had shifted from the 'anthropological evidence' (Peach 2006: 639) that showed British Indians as marrying overwhelmingly within religious and caste groups. Only 25 per cent of my second generation respondents married within caste and 53 per cent of second generation men and 72 per cent of women married within religious group.

Likewise, amongst my second generation female respondents they were less likely than second generation men to marry either a Indian Bengali or British Indian Bengali partner (only 41 per cent of women compared to 60 per cent of men) they were however much more likely to marry someone who was British Indian (79 per cent). Of those 40 per cent of second generation men who did not marry Indian Bengali or British Indian Bengali women 33 per cent married had inter-ethnic marriages. These changes reflected the growing trend towards second generation finding their partner through self selection methods. It would be difficult to ascertain the underlying issues as to why a particular partner was chosen, however these interactions and intermarriages between castes, regional-language groups, *ghar*, ethnic groups and religious groups suggest that members of these various groups increasingly accept each other as social equals. Significantly, the low numbers of intermarriages with British Muslims and no intermarriages with British African and British Caribbean amongst my respondents suggests negative attitudes towards these groups prevail. However, they also are subject to the possibility of what Kalmijn describes as 'group sanctions' where 'even when people have not internalized norms of endogamy, they may still refrain from marrying exogamously because of the sanctions third parties apply' (1998: 400). .

However, what cannot remain in doubt is the extraordinary parity shown in levels of education which stood at 98 per cent between second generation British Indian Bengalis

and their marriage partners. Kalmijn and Kraaykamp (2007) in their study confirm knowledge and cognitive skills as ‘a resource in the stratification system’. Additionally, Kalmijn and Kraaykamp argue that education had become a basis for evaluation and selection in the ‘formation of social networks, friendships, and marriage’ (2007: 569). Significantly, education was increasingly not simply regarded as an additional criterion to ascribed statuses for the second generation. Thus, educational groups had become a status group in its own right for the second generation. For many of the second generation who entered self selecting marriages, they were looking for partners who shared their educational status and associated lifestyles and attitudes; with a decreased emphasis on ascribed statuses.

To conclude, British Indian Bengali second generation both sought and felt pressure to display a “modern” middle class respectability in many aspects of their lives, spanning their social practices, lifestyles and work lives. This respectability formed a part of an identity strategy to distance the second generation from negative South Asian stereotypes prevalent in the media, work institutions and in day-to-day life. In their lives “being modern” for second generation British Indian Bengalis required them to show for example their independence from family, completion of higher education, professional or white collar employment, expressions of romantic love and to communicate a distinction from negative South Asian stereotypes. Whilst notions of “being modern” for the second generation revealed actual increased levels of marriage exogamy, self selecting marriages, independence from kin for example they also exposed discrepancies in the presentation of self and actual practices.

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